The Edward Bliss Emerson Journal Project: Qualitative Research by a Non-Hierarchical Team

José G. Rigau-Pérez
jos.rigau@gmail.com
Silvia E. Rabionet
Annette B. Ramírez de Arellano
Wilfredo A. Géigel
Alma Simounet
Raúl Mayo-Santana

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José G. Rigau-Pérez 
University of Puerto Rico, San Juan, Puerto Rico USA
Silvia E. Rabionet 
Nova Southeastern University, Fort Lauderdale, Florida USA
Annette B. Ramírez de Arellano 
University of Puerto Rico, San Juan, Puerto Rico USA
Wilfredo A. Géigel 
University of the Virgin Islands St. Croix Campus, St. Croix, US Virgin Islands USA
Raúl Mayo-Santana and Alma Simounet 
University of Puerto Rico, San Juan, Puerto Rico USA

In this and subsequent issues, The Qualitative Report will publish eight articles about a journal written by Edward B. Emerson (1805-1834), a younger brother of American philosopher and writer Ralph Waldo Emerson. This introduction will describe the origins of the project, the sources, the process and the outcomes of the collaboration. The authors hope to document and illustrate the richness and value of interdisciplinary qualitative inquiry, while providing specifics of how the Emerson Journal Project evolved. We provide examples to illustrate the characteristics of effective teamwork, but also present the challenges along the way and how they were surmounted. The breadth of the topics in the journal and the range of expertise within the team have resulted in the use of different approaches to examine Emerson’s text. It is the authors’ goal that these essays will enhance the reading of Emerson’s journal, while contributing to the social and historical understanding of the Caribbean. Keywords: Teamwork, Qualitative Research, Textual Analysis, Documentary Editing, Personal Journals, Edward Bliss Emerson

Introduction

In this and subsequent issues, The Qualitative Report will publish eight articles about a journal written by Edward B. Emerson (1805-1834), a younger brother of American philosopher and writer Ralph Waldo Emerson. Edward’s ‘imperfect health’ took him first to Alexandria (Virginia), then the Mediterranean and Europe, where he lived for one year, and, later, following an episode of insanity and a diagnosis of pulmonary consumption, to the West Indies. After a short stay in St. Croix, he moved to "Porto Rico," where he lived for more than three years, with a brief interlude in New England to bid his birthplace his "last farewell." While in St. Croix and Puerto Rico, Emerson kept a journal (1831-1832); he also wrote letters to family and friends until he passed away in October 1834.

1 Edward B. Emerson's Caribbean journal and letters can be accessed online at http://bibliotecadigital.uprrp.edu/cdm/ref/collection/librosraros/id/1701. Unless otherwise specified, his letters from that period can be found in that text. Permissions to quote from Edward Emerson's journal and letters have been granted by the Ralph Waldo Emerson Memorial Association and Houghton Library, Harvard University, and the Massachusetts Historical Society, and are gratefully acknowledged.
His journal and letters include descriptions and personal reflections on life in the Danish (now United States) Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, their peoples, and customs. The diversity of topics, events, and tones caught the attention of a group of scholars with different backgrounds. Each approached the texts from a particular perspective; the result is this series of articles offering a multidisciplinary and contextual interpretation of Edward’s writings.

Travel diaries, journals, and letters provide a window into the inner selves of the writers, while exposing their interpretation and appreciation of the settings, sites, participants and events that surround them. These writings are a valuable source of information for the qualitative researcher interested in understanding how people derive meaning and share past and present experiences as they encounter new places. The unusual circumstances that led six 21st century Antillean scholars in different disciplines to focus on the 19th century writings of a New England intellectual deserve greater explanation. This introduction will therefore describe the origins of the project, the sources, the process and the outcomes of the collaboration. The authors hope to document and illustrate the richness and value of interdisciplinary qualitative inquiry, while providing specifics of how the Emerson Journal Project evolved.

Finding Edward B. Emerson’s Journal and Letters

One of the authors, José G. Rigau–Pérez, had read short, published excerpts of Edward Emerson’s journal and sought the complete manuscript in the Ralph Waldo Emerson Memorial Association deposit at Houghton Library, Harvard University. He inadvertently took down two different call numbers for the text, one from the digital listing and a second from an earlier printed catalog. It turned out that there were two diaries: the manuscript original and a typed transcription dated 1924-1925.

The original journal was written on a small memorandum book typically used to jot down reminders and descriptions. Edward later incorporated these descriptions in the correspondence sent to relatives. In addition to the journal, Rigau came across the recent book by Bosco and Myerson (2006), which includes an extensive collection of letters of the Emerson family that encompassed the dates of the journal. The journal had never been published in full, and only some letters had been included in older biographical works on the Emersons (see, for example, Cabot, 1895; Firkins, 1915; Holmes, 1885). Rigau knew that he had come across an interesting and unique find. He obtained a photocopy of the typescript, made contacts in St. Croix and St. Thomas (where he gave a lecture on Emerson's journal) and waited for the right time to decide how best to approach and share the journal with a broader audience.

A Team Is Born


Rigau presented Emerson's journal to the group in two stages. First, in a "concept review" (as used at the National Institutes of Health) he gave a summary of the contents of the text and showed his only copy around the table. The group (three in person, one by telephone) discussed approaches and gave a preliminary indication of interest. A second meeting was scheduled for two months later, to discuss the possibility of studying and
commenting on the text from different angles or focusing on different topics, as they had done with the diary of Francis W. O'Connor. Rigau had his photocopy transcribed to digital format and shared it with the group, so a formal decision could be taken after all had read the text. All envisioned various ways to connect with the journal, while contributing to the social history of 19th century Puerto Rico and St. Croix. The group also recognized the need to include someone who was familiar with the history of St. Croix. Rigau had already consulted Wilfredo Géigel, who practices law and writes history in the US Virgin Islands, and who (surprisingly) already had a copy of Emerson's diary. The group had discussed that Emerson's learned writing and language deserved particular study. Géigel’s wife, Alma Simounet, a professor of English at the University of the Virgin Islands and University of Puerto Rico, volunteered to join the project and undertake a linguistic analysis of the text.

With six persons committed to the project, the multidisciplinary group was formed. By education and experience, and because each individual has been trained in more than one discipline, the six-member team includes a psychologist, a planner, a physician, a lawyer, a linguist, a philosopher, two educators, three data analysts, three public health practitioners, and four historians. Despite this professional diversity, all are familiar with methods of analyzing a text and using it to expand and contextualize the topic under study. The diversity and complementarity of the group proved effective because it allowed each member to first explore the journal, after which each one proposed developing the theme(s) that seemed most interesting personally and most amenable to analysis. The group then discussed the proposed themes. Some were rejected because they did not figure prominently in the text, while others would have required an unwieldy expansion of the group of researchers. At the end, the group agreed to include a transnational contextualization of the diary, a biographical essay on Emerson, an examination of pulmonary consumption, a review of medical tourism, and explorations of the discursive and philosophical underpinnings of Emerson’s views about the persons, places and situations he encountered, including slavery. In this way, and with reinforcement throughout subsequent meetings, the team developed a clear understanding of, and commitment to shared goals (Barry, Britten, Barber, Bradley, & Stevenson, 1999).

Once the group embarked on its task, it found that at least four previous scholars had tried to publish the journal (see the Editor’s Note in the journal and letters). The first was Sylvester Baxter, of Boston and San Juan, who in 1924-1925 was responsible for having the original located and transcribed in a typed version. His notes and the manuscript of his unpublished book on the Emerson brothers are available at Houghton Library in Harvard University. Approximately 50 years later, Dr. Donald Thompson, a historian of music at the University of Puerto Rico, also studied Emerson’s text and obtained a copy of the typescript, which he eventually gave to Mr. Géigel. Frank Otto Gatell, in 1959, and Félix Matos, in 1991, published short excerpts of the diary related only to Puerto Rico. The work of predecessors both facilitated and complicated the project. They are, unwittingly, part of the team. Baxter’s work, in particular, is a valuable source because he looked into many of the same questions the current team has had concerning persons and events mentioned by Emerson. At the same time, information that he considered reliable can now be disproven; moreover, the typed transcription is not entirely accurate, so the current team has had to correct, annotate, and refine the treasure left by Baxter.
The Working Team and Its Methods

The coordination of multiple collaborators is time-consuming, so team work is undertaken when the completion of a task requires more effort, time, or expertise than one person can provide. A literature review to identify the characteristics of effective teamwork (Mickan & Rodger, 2000) presented three domains that covered 18 traits: Organizational structure (clear purpose, appropriate culture, specified task, distinct roles, suitable leadership, relevant members, adequate resources), Individual contribution (self knowledge, trust, commitment, flexibility), and Team processes (coordination, communication, cohesion, decision making, conflict management, social relationships, performance feedback). Recent reviews of the use of multidisciplinary teamwork in qualitative research have suggested the value of explicit discussions of reflexivity, that is, a discussion of the "awareness of the researcher's own presence in the research process" (Barry et al., 1999, p. 30; see also Hall, Long, Bermbach, Jordan, & Patterson, 2005).

Our group approached teamwork from instinct and personal experience, not from a predetermined theoretical framework for operation. We nevertheless covered the three domains cited above, almost in chronological order. In spite of the experience of group members who had worked with each other, great care (and time) was devoted to a definition of the group's objective, and clarification of the idea of a final product and each member's contributions.

After the team was formed and the themes were selected, each member began the research process, locating additional resources, selecting a methodology or systematic approach to the text, and finally writing and editing the essays. This individual effort was also accompanied by the sharing of sources of information and the collective integration of perspectives (Hall et al., 2005). The project was generally coordinated by José Rigau. He kept a calendar of milestones, provided and monitored timelines, facilitated communication, made available the original texts, and was the liaison with archives and other repositories of primary sources. Leadership was nevertheless participative; different group members guided the activities or proposals that were related to their particular expertise or institutional affiliation. All colleagues have achieved significant seniority in their institutions, so their proposals were taken seriously.

Although each author was responsible for his or her presentations and papers, drafts of articles were subjected to the scrutiny of the entire group. In practice, each essay underwent editorial revision by the coordinator and at least two other team members. The method had been stipulated at the beginning of the team's discussions about the project. An often-intense process that could have caused resentment was offset by the desire to learn from one another. In addition, this awareness of what all authors had written helped prevent the repetitions and information gaps frequently present in multi-authored books. During the process it became evident that the group had the makings of a successful team: mutual trust and accountability, a commitment to excellence, a sense of humor, generosity and a willingness to share findings, and the recognition of the personal and professional constraints that each one faced (Hall et al., 2005).

The authors must give credit to the subject of their work. They can not discount the influence of the Emerson family's example. Many eloquent texts throughout Edward's life evidenced the relatives' demonstrations of mutual support, frequent communication in spite of distance, and awareness of the other's foibles with an unwavering concern to help, not to criticize.

Because team members live in four different cities (from north to south: Washington, DC; Fort Lauderdale, Florida; San Juan, Puerto Rico; and Christiansted, St. Croix), communication was primarily through e-mail, interspersed by periodic meetings. The group
also visited some of Emerson’s old haunts in the Boston area, and had the opportunity to visit archives at Harvard and the Massachusetts Historical Society (Boston). The team consolidated its efforts and received feedback from each other and from experts by presenting its work at different professional meetings in different venues, reaching a variety of audiences over the course of two years. The group shared its "work in progress" during the Annual Eastern Caribbean Island Cultures Conference in Grenada, in 2011 and in The Qualitative Report (TQR) 3rd Annual Conference held in Fort Lauderdale, in 2012. In 2013, the essays were also presented at the annual meetings of the American Historical Association in New Orleans, the Association of Virgin Islands Historians in St. Croix, the IV Puerto Rican Public Health Conference and the 13th Caribbean Conferences Series (University of Puerto Rico) in San Juan, and the Eastern Caribbean Island Cultures Conference in Aruba.

The variety of venues was made possible by the members' diversity of institutional affiliations. It provided an opportunity for the group to convene, revise the papers, and reflect on each member's changing view of the subject of analysis. In the process, and quite unexpectedly, the team approach, which the group took for granted, provoked questions and wonder from the different audiences. Presentations served to further develop professional and personal relationships among team members, and as a mechanism for assuring the completion of intermediate stages by non-negotiable deadlines, as they were externally prescribed.

In the absence of outside funding, each member of the team has contributed to the collective efforts in different ways: by making documents and other sources available to the group, providing housing to colleagues, facilitating the use of offices, and providing other in-kind contributions as needed. And because each team member has personal and professional networks, the group as a whole has had much wider exposure to sources of information and expertise, and opportunities to present to professional audiences, than would have been available to any researcher working alone.

The resources of independent scholars have multiplied thanks to the availability, through the Internet, of references, and primary and secondary sources. Research on the persons and daily routines of small islands two hundred years ago, and the texts of a writer who mixed his observations with languages and literary output from much of Europe took years, but would have taken decades if the authors had not been able to utilize search engines and digital databases. They have been fortunate, also, in the reception the project found in the editors of The Qualitative Report, in the digital media, and the encouragement and assistance given by the journal and its parent institution, Nova Southeastern University (Fort Lauderdale, Florida).

Challenges Along the Way

Three common challenges of multi-author collaborations include difficulties with communications, lack of compliance with deadlines, and resistance to editorial suggestions. The Emerson Project was able to surmount these through anticipatory guidance, flexibility, and peer action.

At the outset, the group understood that some of its members had more time to devote to the project than others. It was agreed that on-going professional responsibilities had to take precedence over the new project. In addition, the lack of frequent personal interaction meant that e-mail communications regarding the project could remain unread, or quickly forgotten among other demands. Anticipating this problem, group meetings focused on the proposed commitments, and made those decisions very explicit. The meetings’ minutes highlighted “action items” and were quickly circulated to all members for approval. Electronic communications allowed for easy and, if necessary, frequent repetition of messages when
responses were unclear or not forthcoming. On rare occasions, the team had to rely on trust, so that in spite of a gap in communications, work was continued with the expectation of a positive result.

Inevitably, some researchers were unable to comply with deadlines due to unforeseen personal or professional constraints. Most group members adhered to the timetable, which in turn created a backlog for the project coordinator and later the journal reviewer. This lag meant that, by the time the initial texts were ready for copyediting, the delayed manuscripts had been submitted.

Perhaps the thorniest problem in collaborative writing occurs when an author’s research reveals a more complex subject than initially conceived, or when, during the writing process, the subject dictates a broader treatment than originally planned. This results in delays, patches of obscure writing, unfocused arguments, and authors’ exhaustion. Editorial comments to the authors can then provoke dismay. Confrontation can risk a ‘take it or leave it’ response from an author. The Emerson team avoided this stage through the use of multiple reviewers and consultation with outside readers. By stressing the need for consensus and quality control, discrepancies were avoided and differences were resolved.

A Multiplicity of Qualitative Methods

Both the breadth of the topics in the journal and the range of expertise within the team have resulted in the use of different approaches to examine Emerson’s text. The methods used therefore vary as a function of the subject matter and the individual author’s background and interests, as described below.

Rigau, an epidemiologist experienced with databases and a historian well-versed in the interpretation of eighteenth and nineteenth-century manuscripts, transcribed and annotated Edward’s text, following closely the recommendations of the Society for Documentary Editing (Kline & Perdue, 2008). His essay on Emerson’s transnational journal is at the same time an introduction to the content of the manuscript texts, a guide to the thematic analytical essays, and a brief comparative presentation of the three societies that elicited Emerson’s reflections: New England, St. Croix, and Puerto Rico. Rigau’s choice of indicators of similarity or difference was guided by their importance in Edward’s own texts.

Rabionet, an educator in the field of public health and health promotion, wrote the biographical essay. Because the journal was limited to events at the end of Edward’s life, she pursued other avenues to collect information about him. She consulted a wide range of sources, including letters to him, from him, and about him, beginning with those written when he was an 11-year old student in boarding school. She also located Emerson’s notes on previous travels, including trips to Europe; his scholarly work and writings while at Harvard, including his orations, class notes and thesis; unpublished manuscripts about the family; official documents, such as the registry of his birth in the City of Concord and the licenses to practice law in Massachusetts and New York; and books and articles about the Emerson family. The examination of these documents, using content and narrative analysis, allowed her to further capture the circumstances and intensity of a life cut short.

Ramírez de Arellano, whose prior work has focused on the intersection between policy and health practices, examined Emerson’s comments on his physical condition and his chosen therapies. Because consumption was considered a constitutional disease that involved the entire body, treatment regimes were comprehensive, involving environmental factors such as climate and occupation as well as lifestyle choices related to nutrition, exercise, and smoking. Edward was diligent keeping a record of everything he did to further his health, providing the researcher with a narrative medical record. Additionally, because he had access to prominent doctors in Boston and New York, it is possible to link his own therapies with
the prevailing medical orthodoxy at the time. A similar method was followed with respect to the topic of slavery, contrasting Edward’s thoughts and reticence with those of other contemporaneous eyewitnesses addressing the same topic.

Géigel, an attorney and historian living in St. Croix, placed Emerson’s voyages within the burgeoning tourism industry of the era, and in the context of the long history of travel in search of health, from Greek and Roman times to the present. He examined the island’s reputation as a haven for invalids in the 19th century, and Edward's personal experience, through the contemporary publications of travelers (some of them invalids who spoke of their experiences) and the government documents of the period.

Simounet, a linguist, performed a close reading of Emerson's words to examine his often unstated opinions about the populations with which he interacted. She used the theoretical and methodological approach of critical discourse analysis to explore the relationship between language, power, and privilege. She specifically focused on Emerson’s construction of reality through his use of language.

Mayo-Santana’s essay explores the philosophical underpinnings of Emerson’s journal and of the letters he wrote to his family at the time. The essay revolves around three main themes: nature writing, American Exceptionalism, and philosophical reflections. The methodological strategy followed was based primarily on qualitative content analysis. The first step in this required the development of a conceptual scheme to illuminate and guide the thoughts and ideas present in the text. A second step involved the elaboration of a series of questions (e.g., how does Edward endure the constraints of a terminal sickness that has already curtailed a promising intellectual career?) and the selection of key themes based on relevant Transcendentalist and naturalist texts. This established the contours of topics of interest and refined their analysis. The conclusion of textual analysis centered on a final question: Does the philosophical idea of the tragic hero apply to Edward's life and demise?

**The Collective Creation**

The team of researchers is committed to making this wealth of information and key eyewitness accounts available to scholars from the Caribbean and the United States. The project therefore has sought to accomplish two fundamental tasks. First, the digital version of an annotated transcription of Edward Bliss Emerson’s Caribbean Journal and Letters has been made available in an open access digital document. Second, the corresponding analytical essays will be published in this and the subsequent issues of *TQR* (articles by Géigel, Mayo-Santana, Rabionet, Ramírez de Arellano, Rigau-Pérez, and Simounet, 2014, in the list of references). It is the authors’ ultimate goal that these essays will enhance the reading of Emerson’s journal, while contributing to the social and historical understanding of the Caribbean. Above all, it is their aim that these materials will elicit further exploration of Edward Emerson's texts and of the many themes they present.

**References**


**Authors Note**

José G. Rigau-Pérez is a graduate of the University of Puerto Rico, Harvard Medical School, and the Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health. As a medical epidemiologist, he conducted research in disease control and outbreak investigations for more than 25 years. He has published widely on the history of health in Puerto Rico and is a member of the American Epidemiological Society and the Puerto Rican Academy of History.

Silvia E. Rabionet is an associate professor in health education at the University of Puerto Rico School of Public Health and Nova Southeastern University College of Pharmacy. She received a BA from Mount Holyoke College, and MA and EdD from Harvard University. She directs the *Puerto Rico Mentoring Institute for HIV and Mental Health Research* which supports junior researchers. She has published about public health education, mentoring, research capacity building, and sociobehavioral aspects of drug use.

Annette B. Ramirez de Arellano is a graduate of Mount Holyoke College (political science), Yale University (city planning), the University of Puerto Rico (health planning),
and Columbia University (doctorate in public health). Her work focuses on health policy and the practice of public health.

Wilfredo A. Géigel is a trial lawyer by profession, an independent scholar, member and past president of the Society of Virgin Islands Historians, and Adjunct Professor of History at the University of the Virgin Islands, St. Croix Campus.

Raúl Mayo-Santana is Ad-Honorem Professor at the School of Medicine, University of Puerto Rico; he has MS and PhD degrees in Psychology and MA in Philosophy. He was principal editor of *A Sojourn in Tropical Medicine* (2008), and has co-authored several books on the history of slavery in 19th century Puerto Rico.

Alma Simounet is a Professor of English and Linguistics at the University of Puerto Rico. She is an active member of the Ph.D. Program in the Literature, Language, and Culture of the Anglophone Caribbean.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to: José G. Rigau-Pérez; E-mail: jos.rigau@gmail.com

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The journal and letters written by Edward Bliss Emerson in the Caribbean provide exciting, idyllic, and at times troublesome visions of those regions but also insights on the life of a sick, poor, religious and brilliant young man. Emerson’s reflections on life in St. Croix remain unquoted, and although brief excerpts from the Puerto Rico portion of the journal appeared in print in 1959 and 1991, his more extensive text supplements the contemporary publications, which only praised the colonial administration. A third, and equally important location, is the implicit base for his perspective – New England in the period of Jacksonian populist democracy. The journal presents terse reminders of daily activities, mixed with extensive descriptions of landscape, exotic civic and religious observances, business and social customs, fruits, music and sports, with personal meditations on Edward’s readings, his search for health, and his adaptation to a new life away from his family, with little prospect of wealth or longevity. His letters include periodic reckonings of the benefits and disadvantages that he saw to life in Puerto Rico. This diverse eyewitness account represents an important resource for researchers of Caribbean society and culture. Keywords: Travel Writing, Personal Journals, Invalids, History of the Caribbean, Caribbean Environment, Jacksonian Era, Edward Bliss Emerson

The name Emerson is associated with a philosophical outlook developed in New England in the middle third of the nineteenth century. It asserted the human capacity to transcend the material world and discern a spiritual state through introspection and self-reliance. It urged the appreciation of nature and prized liberty of conscience and original intellectual responses. These views were presented by Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) and other writers known as Transcendentalists (Mayo-Santana 2014). Ralph Waldo’s views began to reach wide circulation with the publication of his essay “Nature” (1836), but since

1 Edward B. Emerson’s Caribbean journal and letters can be accessed online at http://bibliotecadigital.uprrp.edu/cdm/ref/collection/librosraro/id/1701. Unless otherwise specified, his letters from that period can be found in that text. Permissions to quote from Edward Emerson’s journal and letters have been granted by the Ralph Waldo Emerson Memorial Association and Houghton Library, Harvard University, and the Massachusetts Historical Society, and are gratefully acknowledged.
his early youth he had written extensively on the subjects of religion, philosophy, duty and nature, in correspondence with those we might judge his closest peers – his brothers.

The Emerson brothers were raised with the expectation that academic achievement and religious devotion would uphold the family’s learned tradition, and earn them social standing and economic independence. William (1801-1868), the eldest, and Ralph Waldo, the second, prepared for a religious career as Unitarian ministers. Nevertheless, William became a lawyer, and Waldo left his position as pastor very early. Edward Bliss Emerson (1805-1834) and his youngest brother Charles Chauncy (1808-1836) trained as lawyers. One sibling, Robert Bulkeley (1807-1859), suffered from a physical or psychological illness that impaired his intellectual development, and he earned his keep as a farm laborer, when not interned in an institution. Although sickness was never far from the family, all brothers worked from their early youths. The scholars earned a living as teachers before, during, or shortly after their graduation from Harvard College, where Edward and Charles gained particular distinction.

Edward’s health problems included symptoms that would now merit the diagnosis of pulmonary tuberculosis (Ramírez de Arellano 2014b), and a psychotic breakdown that forced his commitment to an insane asylum for five months in 1828. A recrudescence of chest troubles forced his migration from New York to the Caribbean in December of 1830. A year later, his youngest brother, also affected by what was called a bad cold and by great debility, joined him in Puerto Rico for the winter. Both men died young: Edward in San Juan in 1834 and Charles in New York in 1836. (For a detailed description of the family and its correspondence, see Bosco & Myerson, 2006).

The United States, the Danish West Indies and Puerto Rico – Three Societies in Transition

The United States that Edward left in 1830 was an expanding, changing nation. Ships brought thousands of immigrants from Europe to America, and then ships and railroads took foreigners and nationals to the states and territories on the banks of the Mississippi. Andrew Jackson had been elected president in 1828 in a contest that marked the passing of the politicians who had participated in the War of Independence and the beginnings of massive popular vote. His overwhelming victory at the polls and forceful personality resulted in an unprecedented expansion of presidential power. Nevertheless, Jackson’s decisions on many issues produced violent disagreements between the opposing interests of regions (north and south, coast and plains), economies (agriculture, industry, finance, and trade), classes and races. Edward Emerson’s journal alludes to the controversies on the elimination of the Bank of the United States, the tariff for imported manufactures, the expulsion (“removal”) of Creek Indians from Georgia, slavery, and the alleged power of individual states to declare inapplicable (“nullify”) an Act of Congress that they considered unconstitutional (Parsons, 2009; Tocqueville 1835-1840/1990). Edward feared, with many in his country, that such polarization, especially regarding the institution of slavery, would bring about a civil war. The conflict exploded three decades later.

Edward sailed for St. Croix in December, 1830, in spite of the Boston family’s opinion that he should return home from New York (see letters of Ralph Waldo to William, 29 November, 3 and 5 December 1830 in Rusk, 1939/1966). During the nineteenth century, St. Thomas, St. Croix, and St. John, now the United States Virgin Islands, were Danish colonies. St. Thomas, with free port privileges, served as a regional hub for commerce. In contrast, St. Croix and St. John resembled other Caribbean islands with plantation economies. These were based on slavery, the production of sugar, and the export of its derivatives. As Edward’s journal describes, the St. Croix landscape was marked by windmills, a source of
energy for grinding the cane. This industry, at its peak in the second half of the eighteenth century, promoted business and family ties with England and its colonies in North America (Cabrera Salcedo, 2010). By 1800, the majority of planters were Englishmen. Three decades later, the price of sugar had decreased markedly and most estates in St. Croix were in debt and at risk of foreclosure by the government, for arrears in taxes (Jensen, 2012; Lewisohn, 1970). Emerson’s journal provides evidence that the island also derived some profit from health tourism. English had become the common language of the islanders, and Edward found many North Americans, even Massachusetts acquaintances, who had moved to St. Croix to avoid the cold climate and to strengthen their constitution (Turnbull, 2009). Almost 50 years later, the island was still promoted in the United States as “a winter residence for invalids from Northern climates” (Lewisohn, 1970; Kalmer, 1874; Knox, 1852; See Géigel, 2014).

In the Danish West Indies, a large proportion of business and land proprietors were foreigners, and government allowed religious diversity among them. In contrast, the culture of Blacks and slaves was silenced. In particular, private feasts and “drum dances” required official authorization even after general emancipation (Boyer, 2010). Racial tensions were not absent, but the pressure for change occasionally came from the rulers. By 1831, the acting governor-general of the islands was Peter von Scholten, son of a previous holder of the post, born and raised in Denmark but with 20 years’ experience in St. Thomas before he was appointed its governor in 1823. In July 1848, in response to a mostly peaceful slave revolt, von Scholten decreed the immediate abolition of slavery, to the surprise of the planters. He was forced to resign and return to Denmark shortly thereafter, although the slaves remained free (Lawaetz, 1999, Lewisohn, 1970).

In contrast to St. Croix, Puerto Rico had developed an expanding economy (Cruz Monclova, 1952; Santamaría García, 2008). Agricultural products for export were diverse, and included coffee, sugar, cattle, cotton, and tobacco (Córdoba, 1838/2001). There were also differences in the political and social climates of the two islands. Puerto Rico was ruled by a military government, headed from 1823 to 1837 by Miguel de la Torre, a veteran of the unsuccessful Spanish efforts against Venezuelan independence. The Roman Catholic, racially discriminatory state he represented allowed no dissent. The Island’s economic boom was in part the result of a royal order (Cédula de Gracias, 1815) that offered tax exclusions and land to foreign immigrants, as long as they practiced Catholicism (Hernández Rodríguez, 1989; Rosario Rivera, 1995). Nevertheless, authorities did not enforce religious observance on foreigners, beyond respect for local practices and the prohibition of the rites of any other denomination (see Journal, 2 September 1831; Martínez Fernández, 2002, 2010). These incentives attracted hundreds of immigrant families with their money, implements, and slaves. In contrast to the situation in Cuba and St. Croix, economic conditions in Puerto Rico failed to attract settlers from the United States. Until 1898, their role in agriculture was negligible, although it was important in trade (García Muñiz, 2010). The best example is Edward’s employer, Sidney Mason, whose commercial establishment was based on importation and exportation, not on the sale of crops produced at his Hacienda Santa Barbara. The great landowner in this journal (briefly mentioned on 19 June 1831) is a Puerto Rican, José Ramón Fernández. His prescient Spanish parents financed a course of studies in Spain, England and the United States, so he could properly administer his inheritance. Eventually, he became greatly influential in agriculture, commerce and (extremely conservative) politics, and is better known by his title of nobility, Marqués de la Esperanza.

Sugarcane was the base of the Caribbean economy, and affected the landscape and the daily lives of a large proportion of the population, rich and poor. Most island residents were therefore acquainted with the steps involved in the production of sugar. Some sugarcane fields would be planted with stalks from October to November, to allow them to grow 15 to
18 months before they were cut down. In other lots, the cane would grow from stalks left from the previous crop. Harvest, from January to June, was a frantic season. It was necessary to cut the cane when it had reached its maximum sugar content, and to grind it as soon as possible, so the sucrose in the stalks would not decompose (Cabrera Salcedo, 2010; Jensen, 2012; Mintz, 1960/1974). Edward’s journal frequently mentions specific routines and problems of the contemporary sugar-making technology, but never outlines the entire process. His brother Charles described it at length for a Concord audience, and is abridged here:

The ripe cane is cut in the fields, with knives or cutlasses, […] thrown into a cart & taken to the sugar mill […], where they are compressed between iron rollers […]. The cane-juice flows into a leaden bed & thence into a vessel called the receiver. […] The juice or liquor runs from the receiver to the boiling house, into a large copper called a clarifier. […] After boiling some time, a small quantity of powdered white lime is stirred into it, in order by its alkaline properties to neutralize the acid of the juice. When quite pure and about the colour of Madeira wine, the liquor is laded into the last copper called the teache.² In the teache it is still farther evaporated until it is judged ready for the “striking,” i. e. for being poured into the coolers. The coolers are shallow wooden vessels which hold about a hogshead.³ Here the sugar granulates or crystallizes, separating itself from the molasses. From the coolers it is carried to the curing house where it is potted – or put into hogsheads […] In three weeks the sugar is tolerably dry and fair.”

(Charles C. Emerson, “Lecture on Porto Rico”, delivered at the Concord Lyceum on 9 January 1833, transcribed by Matos Rodríguez, 1993; for recent descriptions of the process, see Jensen, 2012; Pujol, 2009)

At that time, the production of sugar was guided by the experience of “master” workers, who would determine how much lime to add (so that crystallization could occur), how long to boil, and when to “strike”. The planters therefore often engaged in experiments to improve the efficiency of their system and the quality of their product (see Journal for major comments on sugar production on 14, 18, 22 January; 4 February; 18 March; 7, 21, 22 April 1831; for a detailed exposition of technological improvements in Puerto Rico and St. Croix, see Cabrera Salcedo, 2010).

New technology also affected economic and social developments. Steam-powered rollers for grinding sugarcane were introduced in Puerto Rico about 1822, but some “haciendas” continued to rely on oxen, wind or water as a source of power, and even used wooden rollers until the end of the nineteenth century (Cabrera Salcedo 2010). The efficiency of the new mills increased the demand for larger harvests and for the workers to plant them. Slave importation increased in the decade of 1830, in spite of Spain’s participation in international agreements to stop the trade (Díaz Soler, 2000; Morales Carrión, 1978). Colonel George Flinter, whose slant as a Spanish government apologist was detected by Edward, published very positive accounts of the slaves’ condition, and the general progress of the Island under Spanish rule (see letter from Edward to Charles, 30 Nov 1831; Flinter, 1832/1976 and 1834/2002). A severe legal code regulated the conduct and punishment of all

² Teache, variant of Tache (in Spanish, Tacho) – each pan of the series through which the juice extracted from sugarcane is passed for evaporation, especially the smallest and last of these, called specifically the striking (emptying) tache.
³ Hogshead – both an object (cask or barrel) and a unit of measurement (63 gallons in the United States).
Blacks, but in contrast to Danish and most United States practice, it allowed them to congregate in dances with drums. During religious holidays, the slaves did not meet to sing in church. Their sodalities performed music and dances publicly.

Edward Emerson’s journal describes a variety of celebrations. In travelers’ accounts, colorful festivities receive more extensive description than the drudgery of work, but, indeed, spectacle was part of the colonial state’s practice of government. Island residents were allowed little involvement in the management of public affairs, but were encouraged to show support for the Crown, its policies and officials. Contemporary satirists called it “the government of the three Bs,” for balls (dancing), bottles (drinking) and betting (card games) (Brau, 1904/1966). In spite of all the holidays, much work was done, and even Edward looked forward to "the 16 fiestas of this newly opened year as valuable vacations for a compering room scribbler" (6 January 1832).

He witnessed a very promising change in the Island’s administration, the establishment of the Audiencia or local court of appeals. It was expected, through legal expertise, to moderate the judgments of the governor, a military man (Journal, 3 September 1831; Carlo Altieri, 2007). The truly fundamental change everyone could foresee (in fear or hope) was the impending death of King Fernando VII, who ruled personally and had twice derogated the first Spanish Constitution (in 1814 and 1823). At his death in 1833, civil war broke out in Spain, but the administration of the colonies saw little change.

Edward’s three abodes - the United States, the Danish West Indies, and Puerto Rico – were undergoing transformation through similar forces: political transition, immigration, new technology and markets, and reliance on slavery. Health concerns also connected the three countries. Diseases that thrived on the dense, poorly ventilated urban environments of Europe spread to the New World as its cities grew and travelers covered longer distances in less time.

Tuberculosis was the principal reason for Edward’s removal to the Tropics. In his lifetime, the causes of the disease were poorly understood and treatment relied on lifestyle and environmental changes (Ramírez de Arellano 2014b). Affluent invalids seeking a beneficial climate became travelers to places such as the Mediterranean, the southern United States, and the Caribbean. St. Croix and Cuba became well-known as health resorts to New Englanders, probably because of the close economic links (Géigel, 2014). Puerto Rico received some of these visitors, but the Island seems not to have become an attractive haven for northerners. Perhaps it could not compete with the conveniences offered by Cuba – closer, larger, with more sources of entertainment in Havana (Lowell, 2003).

A new menace for the western hemisphere was cholera, an often rapidly fatal diarrhea, spread by contact with infected feces (sometimes through contaminated food or water). It reached America in mid-1833 and Edward learned of its effects in Boston through family correspondence and surely through newspapers. The disease reached Cuba the same year, but, surprisingly, spared Puerto Rico and the Danish islands (Jenson, Szabo, and the Duke FHI Haiti Humanities Laboratory Student Research Team, 2011). The strict quarantine measures adopted by the San Juan government and indirectly imposed on St. Thomas (see Journal, 29 October 1832) may have effectively prevented spread, but the lower volume of maritime traffic (compared to Boston and Havana), the longer voyages of ships from Europe to the Caribbean (which allowed for detection and even extinction of ship-borne epidemics), and the drought conditions in southeastern Puerto Rico may have reduced the possibility of epidemic transmission (Journal, 16 April 1832).
A fourth country – the inner self – is cautiously revealed in Edward’s journal and the letters to his family (see the essays by Rabionet, Mayo-Santana, and Simounet, 2014). Edward routinely kept what he called a “little pocket book” (Edward’s letter to his brother William, 24 August 1830, Massachusetts Historical Society Ms N-251, item 168). It is fitting that his Caribbean journal, which corresponds with the search for a new home, starts like a captain’s log, at sea, with positions, speeds and sightings of land. The journal was used as an agenda or memorandum book to jot down reminders, and as a traveler’s journal to write extensive descriptions, later sent to relatives. His papers include long lists of letters written, with an indication of date, addressee and conveyance. None of the tropical “scenes” in the pocket book can be found in his surviving correspondence, which is an indication of the large proportion that has been lost. Many of his surviving documents are singed, which suggests that others fed the fire in Ralph Waldo Emerson’s home in 1872.

The texts combine the observations of a tourist (focused on exotic civic and religious observances, food, music, and sports), with an educated commentary on the events of the moment and an appreciation of landscape and cultures. Perhaps the necessity of his separation from family and country provoked an abundance of descriptions of flight: kites, horse races, winds, and the speed of sailing ships. Periodically he explained to his brothers the benefits and disadvantages that he saw to life in Puerto Rico. The journal entries mix the factual and the confessional. The day’s occupations, an interlocutor’s assertion or the eye-witness account of a solemnity are jotted down alongside emotions, moods, and the impressions produced by a newspaper or literary work. The style is succinct, but with sufficient detail to bring life and immediacy to the descriptions. It is expressed in a careful, apparently (but deceptively) neutral voice (see the essays by Mayo-Santana and Simounet, 2014) and occasionally signed off by a brief personal, often fanciful, observation. He attends to the concerns of what current historical analysis calls “subalterns” – slaves, the sick, and other groups marginalized in society. The notes include reasoned, sober reflections, but journals, by their nature, may present the author as a different character from the person experienced by his close acquaintances. Edward’s brothers, in their letters, occasionally mentioned their distrust of Edward’s capacity to control impulses, enthusiasms, and ambition. His mind had been once unhinged, and they never forgot the shock of his derangement.

Through his education and later travels in Europe, Edward had become fluent in Latin, Greek and French, and familiar with Italian. He traveled to the Caribbean with a “Spanish Grammar and Exercises” (letter to William, 3 June 1831), and soon after arrival in Puerto Rico began to read Ivanhoe in translation. Before long, he was able to read literary classics and the local historical and statistical publications on Puerto Rico, and could write in respectable Spanish to his brother William. Nevertheless, his “ear” occasionally failed, as with the case of “iberos” for “jíbaros”, and “guirnaldas” for “aguinaldos.” Perhaps he erred too with Dr. “Jorro,” an unusual last name for a physician who fails to appear in the Island’s medical histories. He comments perceptively on Don Quijote, the most famous work in Spanish literature, but fails to note any personal resonance to the story of a voracious reader gone mad, who regains his reason shortly before death.

The elegance of his descriptions, and particularly the causes he supported – abolition of slavery, representative government, general education, freedom of worship, assembly and

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4 See for example, Ralph Waldo, Boston, 22 December 1833, to Edward: “Pray rein in that sanguine genius of yours that risks & projects so magnificently & which I can well remember from Latin School & Andover upward, & make him trot tame & safe for a year or two, for nothing is so important as your health, to which the anxieties of indebtedness will never contribute” (Rusk, 1939/1966, 1, p. 403).
petition—may suggest to readers that they converse with a contemporary. Such is not the case. His views of slaves, free Blacks and the “Spaniards” of Puerto Rico are tempered by racial and geographic determinisms and his conviction of the superiority of New England’s culture (see the essays by Mayo-Santana and Simounet, 2014). Some of his criticism was superficial and unrealistic, as when he objected to house cleaning, farm work, and shopping on Sundays, in a society where laborers worked twelve hours, six days a week, and, unlike him, had no servants (Edward’s letter to Ezra Ripley 30 October 1831). He could, nevertheless, change his views as when he recognized some advantage to “the mode of passing the Sabbath in the West Indies” (Journal, 26 June 1831; letter to Ezra Ripley, 30 October 1831; to William, 29 July 1832).

Emerson’s manuscript reflects contemporaneous conditions at different locations, thus allowing better knowledge of events at each place and their comparison. For example, in St. Croix it hardly mentions the music of the slaves, which in San Juan seems to be found everywhere. The text briefly mentions the writer’s health concerns and his preoccupation with his work and his future, and more often shows his life-long interests and tastes. As a young student away from home, he was always eager to receive fresh fruit (Bosco & Myerson, 2006). In the journal, every new tropical fruit tasted earns a comment. A tireless long-distance walker in youth, in the Caribbean he exercised almost daily, usually as very long walks or rides on horseback, and occasionally swimming or sailing. He covered the western portion of St. Croix (both coast and mountain), and San Juan and towns along the east and west of its bay. The physical pastimes of island residents (horse racing, dancing, flying kites) figure prominently in his descriptions.

Edward recorded events and festivities that were unusual for his “eye & mind of the stranger from New England,” but marked well-known cycles in Caribbean life. He noted the tropical seasons, with emphasis on the weather and the concern about hurricanes. The cycles of commerce are punctuated by the journal’s mention of ships’ speeds, two-way voyages, and commodity prices, while the agricultural seasons are reflected, but not specifically explained. Coffee processing is mentioned in December (1831), because its harvest took place from September to December (García Muñiz, 2010). The many holidays he witnessed in Puerto Rico were mostly related to the Catholic calendar and its celebration of saints, the Christmas period and Christ’s passion and resurrection. Government feasts were mostly special occasions, except such as the king’s patron saint day (May 30) and the memorial of his restoration of absolute monarchy in 1823 (October 1). Edward also marked two very personal dates, his birthday (April 17) and United States Independence (July 4).

The notes for Puerto Rico correspond to the period when Alexis de Tocqueville, the famous political analyst, toured the United States. The coincidence is worth noting, because a reader might be tempted to consider the observations of both travelers (highly intelligent, educated and critical young men) as equally valid. Tocqueville visited the United States on an official mission to examine prison conditions, but his private purpose was to analyze the operations of “democracy in America” (as he came to call his famous book). He interviewed persons in many sections of society in different parts of the country, compared their responses, and thought long and carefully about his analysis before it was published (Damrosch, 2010). In contrast, the surviving fragments of Edward’s correspondence offer no evidence of an intention to systematically analyze the society in which he lived.

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5 William to Edward Emerson, 12 June 1819 (Houghton Library, b Ms Am 1280.226 (2951): “My dear pedestrian brother, what wonders have your two feet accomplished! First, a tour from Waltham to Concord and back again! Then another to Boston!! And to crown these Herculean labours, a journey thence to Concord!!”)
Edward noticed the government’s fear and obstruction of private initiative, which it “considered mutinous” (21 August 1831), yet he uncritically repeated the stereotype of an idle people (25 August 1831), described the residents of Puerto Rico as ignorant, and criticized a society in which money – rather than wisdom, skill, or personal virtue – was the source of prestige (Journal, 26 June and 7 August 1831, 16 August 1833, 5 April 1834; 3 July 1831; 20 July 1832). He arrived (6 April 1831) with some notion of Spanish character, formed from his readings and his travels. He found that “men do not strive here as in New England after the perfect man. It is present pastime or gainful industry or chance which they follow as their stars” (Journal, 3 July 1831). Undoubtedly many islanders, as people everywhere, did not care for self-improvement as much as for entertainment or wealth, but the Catholics around him would have considered human perfectibility a laughable, if not heretical, idea. Curiously, although Tocqueville explored a very different society, he, too, addressed these notions in his description of the United States. Tocqueville asserted that “equality suggests to the Americans the idea of the indefinite perfectibility of man,” and he considered that the distinction based on wealth is a characteristic of “democratic times” (1835-1840/1990: 240-241, 331). It is inappropriate to rebut Edward Emerson’s journal notes in Puerto Rico with Tocqueville’s extensive analysis for the United States, but the contrast is useful to identify generally-held ideas at the time, and to show how the journal, written in the Caribbean, reflects the culture of the author’s native land (see Mayo-Santana’s and Simounet’s essays, 2014).

Emerson was well-informed about the history and political status of the Island, because he read Pedro Tomás de Córdova’s Memorias geográficas, históricas, económicas y estadísticas de la isla de Puerto Rico, published in San Juan from 1831 to 1833. Their first volume presented Friar Íñigo Abbad’s Historia ... de la isla de... Puerto Rico, published in Madrid in 1788. In spite of his readings, Emerson’s surviving texts do not mention the subordinate position of Puerto Rico as a colony. He compared the island to a “docile child” in the way it followed the mother country in its religion (letter to Ezra Ripley 30 October 1831). He referred to its inhabitants as Spaniards or “Iberos,” never Puerto Ricans, perhaps because the colony seemed to him an integral part of Spain. He echoed the view proclaimed by the government, in spite of its constant vigilance for local insurgency or slave revolts.

Edward heard Colonel George Flinter read from his manuscripts, and helped him obtain estimates of costs from editors in Boston, but at the same time perceived that the colonel was too eager to please authorities to be impartial in his description of Puerto Rico (Journal, 19 June, 9 August, 8 September 1831; 8-11 February 1832; Edward’s letter to Charles 30 November 1831). It must be noted that Emerson assisted not only friends of the government, but also those it held under suspicion. Although to oblige Mr. Mason, he helped Francisco Goyena (1805-1857), a Puerto Rican military officer separated from the Spanish army for liberal tendencies, in trying to get a miniature portrait of general La Torre printed by an engraver in Boston (Edward’s letter to William, 6 December 1832; Vidal, 2011).

Edward praised freedom of action as a feature of life in San Juan. What he meant is explained in a letter to his aunt Mary (5 April 1834). He described local government as the sort that “exempts the private man from the trouble of taking any pains about the management of public affairs; he has only to let the state alone & mind his own business.” The liberty Edward enjoyed meant complete disengagement from discussion about, and action on, society’s problems or objectives. As a result, Edward saw no “patriotic notion,” but apathy and ignorance. He told his aunt that the environment was favorable for literary work, because it offered no distractions. The educated man could work without interruptions such as requests for papers, for lectures or for support of a cause. Maybe he wrote with irony, in view of the many other times he lamented his intellectual isolation. Perhaps he would have been amused to learn that, almost two centuries later, the generic name assigned in Puerto
Rican slang to a United States native who speaks or gives orders with little knowledge of local culture is "Mr. Ñemerson." It seems to be a twentieth century invention, but the possibilities for its etymology would have fascinated Edward.

Death

Edward returned to Boston in July of 1832, in apparent recovery, but by November he resumed his post at Mason’s office in San Juan, both as mercantile clerk and consul’s assistant. In spite of declining health, he maintained his accustomed activities until a “violent cold” brought his life to an end on October 1st, 1834. Sidney Mason arranged for Edward’s medical care and took the precaution of calling a Catholic priest to administer the last rites to the unconscious patient. In that way, the consul secured a dignified burial in the cemetery in old San Juan, where only Catholics would be received (Martínez Fernández, 2002). The family sent a marble headstone, in English and Latin, to mark what they considered to be a temporary grave. The tablet is now at the Sleepy Hollow Cemetery in Concord, Massachusetts, on the Emerson family plot, but Edward’s remains seem to have joined the soil of Puerto Rico (Bosco & Myerson, 2006).

Edward Bliss Emerson’s visit to Puerto Rico left hardly a mark on official documents. Barring new findings, there is only the burial certificate and one letter signed as consul’s agent (5 October 1833, Palerm Rincón, 1982). In contrast, the Caribbean world he knew fills his private papers with its sights, odors, sounds, worries and celebrations. To the present-day researcher, his journal and letters speak of exotic and commonplace subjects, all of which contributed to the formation of the cultures of the United States, the Danish West Indies and Puerto Rico, and their interrelationships then and now.

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Author Note

José G. Rigau-Pérez, a graduate of the University of Puerto Rico, Harvard Medical School, and the Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health, has served as coordinator for this series of articles on the Caribbean journal and letters of Edward Emerson. He has received no funding for this project and has no conflict of interest to report. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to: jos.rigau@gmail.com

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Article Citation

Edward Bliss Emerson: The Blazing Star of a Complex Constellation

Silvia E. Rabionet
Nova Southeastern University, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, USA

Edward Bliss Emerson, a younger brother of Ralph Waldo Emerson and a promising scholar in his own right, traveled to the West Indies at the age of 26 hoping to alleviate his pulmonary afflictions. While in the islands, from January 1831 to July 1832, he logged his daily activities in a pocket journal. The journal falls short in revealing Edward’s childhood, his years at Harvard, and his brief time as teacher and lawyer. This biographical essay aims to enhance the understanding and enjoyment of the journal. It unveils defining stages in Edward’s life. Using a wide variety of archival documents, the author illustrates how Edward adapted to new circumstances and places, while renewing his quests for health, education and purpose. Key words: Edward Bliss Emerson, West Indies, St. Croix, Puerto Rico, New England, Education, Harvard College, Biography

From a Death to a Life

Edward is....eager to be in motion, full of contradiction, benevolent & pure. He is a very singular person - has great powers & yet wants common sense.

Letter of 13 September 1832, Charles C. Emerson to Mary Moody Emerson; MH bMS 1280.226 (67).

Edward Bliss Emerson, a younger brother of Ralph Waldo Emerson and a promising scholar in his own right, traveled to the West Indies at the age of 26 hoping to alleviate his pulmonary afflictions. He arrived in St. Croix and spent three months there before moving to Puerto Rico, where he lived for the last three years of his life. While in the islands, from January 1831 to July 1832, he logged his daily activities in a pocket notebook or journal. The firsthand account of his years in the islands, with illness and death hovering over his activities, is a counterintuitive starting point to understand his life and his elusive quests. Nevertheless, it provides a window into his inner self, revealing his psyche and evoking his New England upbringing. The journal can be read as the record of the thoughts and musings of a young man battling to improve his physical, spiritual and intellectual selves. The entries in the journal are therefore those of a young man eager to live the moment, holding other aspirations at bay in the hope of recovering his health. Edward’s daily activities sought to improve his symptoms, appease his anxieties, engage his intellect, and perfect his soul.

1 Edward B. Emerson's Caribbean journal and letters can be accessed online at http://bibliotecadigital.uprrp.edu/cdm/ref/collection/librosraros/id/1701. Unless otherwise specified, his letters from that period can be found in that text. Permissions to quote from Edward Emerson's journal and letters have been granted by the Ralph Waldo Emerson Memorial Association and Houghton Library, Harvard University (abbreviated in this paper as MH), and the Massachusetts Historical Society (MHi), and are gratefully acknowledged.
Edward’s simple jottings, some of them quite trivial, reveal his keen appreciation of events, people, and nature. As was the custom at the time, especially among young travelers, he carried a small notebook and pencil in his pocket and used his spare moments to write down interesting facts, thoughts, and reflections. This convention sharpened the writer’s powers of observation, and was seen as a useful method to improve the intellect (Alcott, 1834).

Edward’s journal entries shortly after arriving in the Caribbean show an awareness of his physical frailty and imminent death as well as a willingness to embrace the exuberant nature of the tropical environment. He wrote:

Chance led me directly into the graveyard where some victims to consumption were laid which had come hither from New York, a Mrs. Barrell, age 19 and a minister, age 32. (6 January 1831)

The whole structure of the house is of course adapted for relief from heat and light, full of windows and drafts and at first I think as terrible to an invalid as any contrivance could make it but he grows bold and the climate grows kindly and perhaps he gets well by some of the many remedies which nature here holds to every sense. (4 January 1831)

Edward’s quest for health was elusive. He did not recover in the Tropics. On October 1st, 1834, at the age of 29 he succumbed to consumption. Throughout his short life, Edward experienced intense moments of tension between his undertakings and his frailties. According to those who knew him, his accomplishments and brilliance were as prominent as his mental and physical weakness (Bosco & Myerson, 2006; Cabot, 1895; Friskins, 1915; Holmes, 1885; and the family letters). His older brother, Ralph Waldo, mourned Edward’s death in the poem "In Memoriam," and called him "brother of the blazing star," "champion of the right," "born for success," but succinctly described the paradox in one verse: "All, all was given, and only health denied" (Emerson, 1909, p. 192).

Although the journal reveals Edward’s interests and some features of his character, it falls short in portraying how he excelled as a young man of his time and education. Edward’s childhood, his years at Harvard, and his brief incursions as teacher and lawyer all reveal a character full of zeal, contradictions, and self-discipline. He was a star among a complex constellation of brothers, patriots, and philosophers and a blazing star that left an unusual trail in the Tropics. Throughout his life Edward had to adapt to new circumstances and places. In each, he renewed his life quests for health, education, soul searching, and adventures.

**The Early Years**

...under a humble roof, the eager, blushing boys discharging as they can their household chores, and hastening into the sitting-room to the study of tomorrow's merciless lesson...

Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Domestic Life” in Emerson (1902), p. 358.

Edward was born on April 17, 1805, the fifth child of eight born to Reverend William Emerson and Ruth Haskins. He and six of his siblings were born in the parish house of the
First Unitarian Church of Boston, of which his father was the minister (Snider, 1921). Edward was baptized on May 19, 1805. His mother took him “calm and undisturbed” to the altar where he was blessed by his father. His siblings were sitting in the front pew, the younger ones dressed in yellow flannel and the older ones in dark blue nankeen jackets and trousers (Haskins, 1886). On the occasion of his baptism, Mrs. Emerson wrote in her diary:

I went to meeting and then dedicated our child in the house of God. He was baptized by his father Edward Bliss. Accept the offering we then made into thee O Lord and may the child live and grow up before thee and may thou the Lord God of His fathers bless him. (R. Haskins, diary 19 May 1805; MH: 1805; MH bMS AM 1280.235 (398))

His mother’s wishes were only partially granted: Edward’s blessings proved to be short-lived. Three of his siblings, John, Mary Caroline and Phoebe, died at very young ages. Another, Robert Bulkeley had developmental problems which prevented his benefiting from the rich education that the other brothers experienced (Beyer, 2000; Emerson, 1890). William, Ralph Waldo, Edward and Charles developed a close fraternal relationship characterized by the advantages as well as the “burden of having been born an Emerson, with social, political, and ecclesiastical roots extending back to the first century of New England settlement” (Bosco & Myerson, 2006, p. viii).

The Emerson’s ancestors included eminent clergymen, but there was also a “succession of superior mothers,” loyal wives responsible for developing their children’s moral character and religious devotion (Holmes, 1885). On the paternal side, the Emersons had been poor in money ever since the days of Edward’s great-grandfather, Joseph Emerson. But a paucity of material resources did not prevent them from aspiring to spiritual riches and the intellectual advantages of becoming learned men. The Emerson family was one of a selected number of Boston families referred to as the “Academic Races,” and the Emerson last name appeared in Harvard College catalogues for generations, dating to colonial times (Firkins, 1915; Holmes, 1885). For Edward and his brothers, Harvard College was “the gate through which many of their ancestors had gone to the storehouses of godly knowledge” (Emerson, 1890, p. 7).

Edward’s father, the Reverend William Emerson was born in Concord, Massachusetts. He went to Harvard at 16 years of age, “prematurely but not precociously prepared” (Emerson, 1949, p. 488). He graduated in 1789 and taught for two years before becoming a pastor in Boston’s neighboring town of Roxbury. His first appointment as minister was in 1792 in a church in Harvard, Massachusetts. There, he met Ruth Haskins of Boston, whom he married in 1796. Three years later, he became the pastor of the First Church in Boston, a position he held until his death from consumption in 1811, at the age of 42 (Johnson & Brown, 1904). Edward was only six when his father died.

Ruth Emerson, left with six children between the ages of 2½ months and 10 years, struggled to support the family after her husband’s untimely death. She had few savings, and no pension or retirement allowances to fall back on. But she relied on school teaching for some income, and made “many a sacrifice to preserve the freedom for her sons to think, to study, and to live in the realm of high intellectual achievement” (Emerson 1949, p. 490). The family also received some support from the church, relatives and friends, and she was allowed to stay in the parish house for some time. At the age of eight, Edward had to leave the yellow, gambrel-roof structure that stood on an acre of orchard and garden ground that had been his birth home (Eastman, 1983). Ruth and the children moved to a house in Atkinson Street, and then to Beacon Hill, where she took in boarders. George Barrell
Emerson, a teacher by profession and a relative who later sponsored Edward’s education and travel, boarded with the family and recalls,

…among her sons I found William, whom I had long known and loved, the best reader, and with the sweetest voice I ever heard, and a pleasant talker; Ralph Waldo, whom I had known and admired, and whom all the world now knows almost as well as I do; Edward Bliss, the most modest and genial, the most beautiful and the most graceful speaker, a universal favorite; and Charles Chauncey, bright and ready, full of sense, ambitious of distinction, and capable of it. There was never a more delightful family or one more sure of distinction, the intimate acquaintance with which has had a most benignant influence on my whole life; and in that family I found a home. (Emerson, 1878, p. 59)

Once Edward’s father passed away, his sister, Mary Moody Emerson, emerged as a leading figure in the lives of the Emerson brothers. She shared with Ruth the tasks of raising and educating the five boys. With stern love, they shaped many of Edward’s scholarly ambitions and religious quests. The late Reverend William was considered a liberal pastor (Cayton, 1989) and his wife probably shared his views, but Aunt Mary, as the boys called her, was stricter than the mother in setting high moral standards. On occasion, she criticized her sister-in-law for allowing for “mirth and frivolity” (Cabot, 1895, p. 38), but she took great pride in her nephews’ accomplishments, which she believed resulted from firm religious devotion and discipline.

The closest male figure in Edward’s life was the Reverend Ezra Ripley, second husband of his paternal grandmother. He was the only grandfather the Emerson brothers knew and he maintained close ties with them as a trusted force, spiritual advisor, and mentor. He also, at times, provided financial support and shelter (Woodberry, 1907). The Ripleys lived in Concord in a house called the “Old Manse” which later belonged to Ralph Waldo. The visits of the Emerson boys to their grandparents in Concord were joyful events.

As boys they all came to the grandmother’s at the Manse, and Dr. Ezra Ripley could hardly have been more kind or more indulgent to them than had they been their own, instead of his step-grandsons. They were enthusiastically welcomed by young and old. These city boys roamed and dreamed and recited their poetry in the woods nearby and along the river banks. (Cooke, 1902, p. 10, citing Ralph Waldo Emerson)

The Emerson household was not unlike other New England homes that valued scholastic accomplishments and moral pursuits even while facing financial and physical adversity (Woodberry, 1907). For Mrs. Emerson, “provision for her sons meant more than mere food, raiment, and shelter. Their souls first, their minds next, their bodies last: this was the order in which their claims presented themselves to the brave mother mind” (Emerson, 1890, p. 8). A descendant of the Emersons also stressed Ruth Emerson’s priorities: “If a precious book were needed for school or college studies, the coal oil for the hall lamp could be given up. Better a dark hall than a starved mind” (Emerson, 1949, p. 490). Stories were used to divert thoughts of hunger, and other hardships experienced by the Emerson brothers provided opportunities for fraternal bonding in unique ways. One winter Ralph Waldo and Edward wore the same coat to school on alternating days, one taking “lecture notes for the other not clad to meet a northeast snowstorm” (Emerson, 1949, p. 191; Firkins, 1915; Snider,
The brothers engaged in a pattern of the older ones supporting the younger ones, a practice that they maintained well into adulthood (Haskins, 1886).

From an early age all the Emerson boys were expected to follow the long-established pathway to guarantee a seat at Harvard. Following the tradition of their predecessors, this pathway included an early start at a dame school followed by grammar and Latin schools. Dame schools were small private schools run by women in their own homes to teach young boys and girls to read English through spelling. This was a requirement for admission to grammar and Latin schools (Emerson, 1903). At age 3, Edward entered a dame school, most likely in the neighborhood where he grew up, near the “parsonage” of Summer Street in Boston (E.E.M, 1903). Once in the Latin and grammar schools, the boys studied the Bible, arithmetic, and Latin grammar. Then, when “a boy could speak and write Latin, read at sight some classical author, and inflect Greek nouns and verbs, he was ready for Harvard” (Emerson, 1903, p. 137).

Young Edward and his brothers engaged in little play with the neighboring boys. When not at a school of some sort, they were expected to spend most of their time reading and writing and helping with chores around the house, including taking the cow to pasture (Sanborn, 1897). In a letter written by Ralph Waldo to Aunt Mary when he was almost ten and Edward was eight, he described a “normal” day for him and his brothers.

In the Morning I rose, as I commonly do, about 5 minutes before 6. I then help Wm. in making the fire, after which I set the table for Prayers. I then call mamma about quarter after 6. We spell… I confess I often feel an angry passion start in one corner of my heart when one of my Brothers gets above me…then I have from about quarter after 7 till 8 to play or read. I think I am rather inclined to the former. I then go to school, where I hope I can say I study more than I did a little while ago. I am in another book called Virgil, and our class is even with another which came to the Latin School one year before us. After attending this school I go to Mr. Webb’s private school, where I write and cipher. I go to this place at eleven and stay till one o’clock. After this, when I come home I eat my dinner, and at two o’clock I resume my studies at the Latin School, where I do the same except in studying grammar. After I come home I do mamma her little errands…I then have some time to play and eat my supper. After that we say our hymns or chapters, and then take our turns in reading Rollin… We retire to bed at different times. I go at a little after eight, and retire to my private devotions, and then close my eyes in sleep, and there ends the toils of the day. … (letter of 16 April 1813, cited in Myerson, 1997, p. 41)

At the time, Edward was also attending the Boston Public Latin School. He enrolled in the class of 1813 with eighteen other boys at the new building on School Street, in the center of Boston. One of the students remembered that “plain as everything was, … you could not find a school in our city showing more earnest, successful study, or more real schoolboy happiness…” (Jenks, 1886, p.106). Boston Latin’s primary goal was to prepare young men for admission to Harvard, and at least fifty percent of each class entered the renowned institution. The school earned the reputation of creating among its students the intellectual, moral, religious, and civic culture that distinguished Boston and its place in the birth of the nation (Jenks, 1886).

William, Ralph Waldo, and Charles also studied at Boston Latin, thereby securing their admission to Harvard College. William was already at Harvard when Edward was at the Latin School, and the younger brother constantly wrote William inquiring about his
involvement in Harvard life. Edward also reported on his own progress: “We have attended to study of geography the last week and our Mr. Gould made it very pleasing to us. We study geography once in three weeks...then change to Arithmetic. In Greek I have gone as far as Lucian’s Dialogues” (letter of 24 January 1816 EBE Boston to William Emerson (WE) Waltham; MH bMS Am 1280.226 (250)). His scholarly interests and ambitions were already well-defined; he knew what would prepare him for the Harvard curriculum.

**Boarding at Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts**

*While thro’ the midst with elevated mien
Stalks “Edward Emerson the great” between
Hark the loud clangor of the sounding bell
To Andoveria’s College hails thee well.*

Letter of 15 October 1816, Ralph Waldo Emerson (RWE) to Edward B. Emerson; RWE Memorial Association 1939, p.18

At the age of 11, Edward interrupted his studies at Boston Latin, where he was first in the class, because he was offered the opportunity to enter the prestigious Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts. Of the four brothers capable of scholarly pursuits, Edward was the only one who studied at Andover. At the time, Phillips Academy was considered a very orthodox school which contrasted with the liberal legacy of the late Reverend William Emerson (Cayton, 1989). Nevertheless, the investment in an expensive boarding school underlines the value placed on education among the Emersons, and the promising future that they saw in Edward. Edward’s family knew that the prestige of enrolling in the Academy would give the boy a decided advantage and set him early on the desired scholarly path. Mrs. Emerson accompanied Edward to Andover, leaving him in the care of Mrs. Phebe Abbot, who boarded other students. He began a probationary period that went by quickly (letter of 3 December 1816; RWE Memorial Association, 1939). Upon arrival, Edward observed: “The young gentlemen here are very serious and religious; after family prayers at evening we all join in social prayer” (letter of 1 November 1816 EBE Andover to Ruth Haskins Emerson (RHE) Boston; MH bMS Am 1280.226 (225)).

During his two years at Andover, Edward, who was among the youngest in his class, studied relentlessly. He also had to work to help support himself and could not go home during vacation, although he longed to be with the family. Other sacrifices included wearing torn clothes, not having enough wood for fire or money for school supplies, and having to board far from the school (letter of 19 October 1816 EBE Andover to RHE Boston; MH bMS Am 1280.226 (224)). In spite of these inconveniences and discomforts, he took advantage of all the scholarly opportunities that the Phillips Academy offered. Edward constantly received encouraging correspondence from his mother, aunt and brothers. In his responses he tried to reassure them about his well-being; but his letters also reveal a deep sense of longing and homesickness, especially during the first year. Occasionally the letters from home came with parcels of essentials that he welcomed with great joy.

Even at this early age, Edward’s letters anticipate the nature of the relationship that he would later develop with each of his correspondents. Aunt Mary’s letters always provided spiritual guidance and reminded him of his religious duty. She was also intent on influencing him and his brothers to enter the ministry. (For example, her letter of 10 January 1818; MH bMS Am 1280.226 (749)). In contrast, his mother’s letters were affectionate and caring. Writing back, he reciprocated her affection, revealing a high level of appreciation, respect,
William’s letters gave Edward advice on what to study to obtain a “respectable rank as a scholar” upon his entrance to Harvard. Because Edward could not go home for vacations, William suggested that he devote his leisure time to reading history and composition (letter of 28 December 1816 WE Boston to EBE Andover; MH bMS Am 1280.226 (2948)). Charles’s letters reported on the home front; they corresponded in a more casual and candid way, not trying to impress each other. With Ralph Waldo, Edward was more sentimental and intellectual; they shared passages of their readings and poems. Edward regarded Waldo with admiration and saw him as a “very fine scholar.” Indeed, Edward constantly measured himself against Ralph Waldo, whom he believed was on the way to becoming a pastor. In contrast, Edward felt that he did not know his path. In a letter written in verse, Edward noted:

You [Ralph Waldo] seem for Hope an advocate to stand,
That points the sailor to his native land,
That leads the Christian up the hill of God,
And gives him courage, on the heavenly road
That dying martyrs at the stake sustains
And give relief to all great woes and pains
Your cause is good, your arguments are true
And with pleasure your rhyming power view.

But in what cause shall I my pen employ?
Whether a subject that brings pain, or joy?
Whether the cares that now embitter life?
The joys of friendship or the pangs of strife?
No! I’ve no time on threadbare themes to waste
But fill my sheet with “sentiment and taste”.
(Letter of 1 October 1817 EBE Andover to RWE Boston; MH bMS Am 1280.226 (184))

In addition to coping with the harsh academic discipline of the Phillips Academy and the lack of essential comforts, Edward struggled with frequent illnesses. These were a source of concern to his mother and aunt. Their letters to Edward consistently provide advice on healthful habits, reminding him to eat properly, stay warm, and go to bed early. Even Charles, who was still at home pursuing studies at Boston Latin, reminded Edward to eat properly (letter of 2 November 1816 Charles Chauncy Emerson (CCE) Boston to EBE Andover; MH bMS Am 1280.226 (2)). In a humorous “adieu” in one of the letters, Aunt Mary reminded Edward that “Dr Moody [herself] is ever interested in the health and welfare of the Bliss Patient [Edward]” (letter of 9 November 1816; MH bMS Am 1280.226 (748)).

By his second year in Andover, Edward seemed to have settled down and matured. He enjoyed the academic challenges and took pleasure in long walks. In January 1818, he wrote to his mother: “If Andover was only home I should live happy enough. I am very satisfied except when I look around for Mother and Brothers; and though I can see everything else to render me contented and happy, yet I cannot see them” (letter of January 12 1818; MH bMS Am 1280.226 (229).
Harvard Delayed

_The circumstances of the family have not permitted your entering College this year._
_This you feel at present as deprivation…_ Persevere, and you will never repent it.

William Emerson to Edward B Emerson, letter of 14 September 1818. MH bMS am 1280.226 (2950).

Edward left Andover in 1818, at the age of 13. He had already been admitted to Harvard and was looking forward to following William, who had graduated that year, and joining Ralph Waldo, who was then enrolled in the College. Family resources were strained, however, and Edward had to postpone the fulfillment of his aspiration in order to earn enough money to pursue his studies. Edward came to terms with the delay, but confessed to William that “all the scholars that entered [Harvard] from Andover seemed so pleased with their new situation that at the time I almost wished I had entered this year, but I think that the next year I shall be glad I did not” (letter of 22 September 1818 EBE Andover to WE Boston; MH bMS Am 1280.226 (254)).

For two years, he worked as an under-teacher in Waltham at the school of his uncle, the Reverend Samuel Ripley, and his young wife Sarah. He thus followed the track of his brothers William and Waldo, who also taught in order to earn money for their college tuition (Thayer, 1897). He also devoted time to perfect and improve his composition skills and mathematics with the goal in mind of becoming a “first scholar” upon entrance to Harvard. His scholastic brilliance was immediately noticed by his benefactors and by the boys under his tutelage. He felt “tolerably well pleased” and busy in his situation as teacher, “occupied constantly from 6 in the morning till 8 o'cock at night.” For entertainment, he attended dancing school twice a week (letter of 13 Nov 1818 EBE Andover to RHE Boston; MH bMS Am 1280.226 (240)). During those two years, Edward was not free from physical distress. He suffered colds that kept him away from the boys for weeks at a time. Sarah Ripley, who admired the young Emersons, felt that she had nothing to desire them but health (Goodwin, 1998).

Edward also had to spend five months, from January to May 1819, with relatives in Alexandria, Virginia, to enjoy what was considered a more suitable climate for his afflictions. During this sojourn, Edward was exposed to a very different environment from the one he had experienced in New England. He went to multiple parties; learned to observe people and their clothes; and even visualized himself departing for southern lands. Curiously, he mentions the possibility of traveling to the Caribbean: “I hope a chance [for a voyage] may offer soon to Havana or some southern port…” (letter of 23 March 1820 EBE Alexandria to RWE Boston; MH bMS Am 1280.226 (191)). He would have that chance eleven years later.

The Harvard College Years

_He that would erect a magnificent structure, should lay a large cornerstone._

Edward Bliss Emerson to Charles Emerson, letter of 28 January 1824 MH bMS Am 1280.226 (170)

Edward finally entered Harvard College in 1820 and shared a room at Hollis Hall (Hollis 9) with his brother Waldo, who was then a senior. At the time, Harvard provided an
atmosphere conducive to liberal free-thinking. The intellectually adventurous and stimulating environment attributed to the presidency of John T. Kirkland by contemporaries and historians was seen as appropriate for the development of young gentlemen (Bailyn, Fleming, Handlin & Thernstrom, 1986). Edward’s college years were once again accompanied by financial constraints. He worked as a teacher during vacations in order to supplement his expenses. He also received scholarships and benefited from the largesse of family friends. Kirkland was one of his benefactors, as he had been a college classmate of Edward’s father, remained a close confidant during their early years as Unitarian ministers, and after William Emerson’s death had remained a family friend (Sacks, 2003). Edward also received support from the Pen Legacy, a charity fund administered by the First Church, where his father had been the minister (Bosco & Myerson, 2006).

As on previous occasions, financial hardships did not distract Edward from the Harvard scholarly experience. Edward followed a plan of study aimed to teach young men to write, calculate, and speak eloquently. The course of study consisted of a total of twelve terms of scheduled instruction, three per year. Over the course of four years the students took 33 subjects, including ancient languages such as Greek and Latin, mathematics, history, English grammar, philosophy, elementary physics, chemistry, astronomy, political economy and Bible study. Edward excelled in the public examinations held for each subject, and in the public exhibitions held for composition, elocution, and mathematical sciences, conducted three times a year. He wrote on topics such as the pursuit of happiness, education, modernity and antiquity, and Asian cultures. His writings reflected an understanding of the classics, command of the English language, and essay and poetry writing. He also mastered the rhetorical arts, oration and declamation. One of his classmates recalled Edward’s talents with admiration:

I see him to-day as then, more than half a century ago, gifted with rare personal beauty, an eye large and beaming with genius, and a face radiant not more with a surpassing intellect than a fascinating sweetness. He had a mind uniting strength and fertile resources, and even then stored with ample reading, a character manly and influential, and a reverence for divine things seldom equaled at his age. I recall an oration of his at one of our "exhibitions," mature in thought, sparkling with illustration, full of Scriptural allusions, and delivered with a grace and power which showed him destined to stand in the front rank, as of scholarship, so of oratory. (Muzzey, 1882, p. 347)

Edward was fully aware of the future significance of being first in his class at Harvard, and would not settle for being second-best. He shared his competitive and ambitious spirit with his younger brother Charles: “I imagine the difference (which springs thence) between obscurity & fame, between sitting in a little office from morn till night, without a single client, & thundering away, the lord of the forum, or the leader of the council; Yes, Charley, those few feet, which separate in school & in College the 1st from the 4th, nay even that inch of space, which divides the 1st from the 2d, will widen inconceivably” (letter of 28 January 1824; MH bMS Am 1280.226 (170)).

Edward held prominent positions in all the Harvard clubs in which he enrolled. From 1822 to 1824 he was the President and Poet of the Hasty Pudding Club, founded in 1795 to encourage the feelings of friendship and patriotism among members of the junior and senior classes (Hasty Pudding Club, 1884; Longfellow, 1875). Edward was also the 3rd Commandant of the Harvard Washington Corps, a voluntary military organization for upperclassmen. The Corps surpassed other groups in Boston in the precision of its military movements and display of discipline. The Corps engaged in rigorous drilling three to four
times a week, from 1:00 to 2:00 PM and after “commons” at night. Once a year they had a parade that brought a sense of dignity to Harvard Square. They also held several galas during the year and observed full-dress parade days and drills at the Exhibitions at the end of each academic term (Lonthrop, 1875). There is no record of any of Edward’s brothers participating in the Corps. This might explain why Edward was described as having “a military carriage … confidence and executive ability…” (Emerson, 1890, p. 51).

In contrast with his participation in prestigious clubs and societies, Edward was also a member of the Medical Faculty Club (also referred to as the Med. Fac.). This shady group, with secretive reputation, active between 1818 and 1834, was labeled as a “merry-making association” or fraternity. Its members met in Hollis Hall to deliver mock medical lectures, perform mock experiments and confer mock degrees, among other pranks. One of the few public displays indicating membership in this club was evident at graduation, when students in the Med. Fac. wore a black rosette with a skull and cross bones (Eliot, 1875; Hatch, 1907; Holmes, 1875). In 1826, Charles followed Edward’s footsteps and assumed the vice presidency of the Med. Fac. (letter of 25 November 1826 CCE unidentified location (NP) to RWE Charleston, SC; MH bMS Am 1280.226 (91)).

Edward is remembered “as the Emerson who achieved the best record of the four brothers at Harvard, where he graduated first in his class and took almost every other academic honor available…” (Bosco & Myerson, 2006, p. 53). During the exhibition in the second term of the 1824, he presented a highly praised Mathematics chart, “Calculation and projection of a solar eclipse in May, 1836”. The eclipse actually occurred as predicted, but Edward did not live to see it. In 1824 he was awarded (following Ralph Waldo’s steps) the prestigious Bowdoin prize for his oration on “Antiquity, Extent, Cultivation, and Present State of the Empire of China” (letter of 25 July 1824; RWE Memorial Association, 1939, p. 157). Upon graduation he was elected a member of Phi Beta Kappa, a prestigious society that promoted “literature and friendly intercourse among scholars.” His father and his brother Ralph Waldo had also been elected to the same society. And, following Edward, Charles received the same honor (Phi Beta Kappa, 1902).

Edward’s departure from Harvard was marked by events that highlight the prestige, solemnity and dignity of his accomplishments. He graduated in the 1824 Commencement, which has been described as the “most memorable Commencement exercises which those old walls had ever witnessed…” (Quincy, 1896, p. 55). General Lafayette was in the United States on the occasion of the American Revolution’s 50th anniversary, and was invited to visit Harvard College. The Commencement seemed the perfect occasion to honor the general who had secured French support for America and had distinguished himself during the War of Independence. The excitement of meeting the aged hero attracted numerous ladies and gentlemen, who assembled at the end of August in the meeting house of the First Parish of Cambridge, following the Commencement tradition of the time. Memorably, Edward shared the stage with the noted guest. As the first scholar of the class, he addressed the audience with an oration on the “Advancement of the Age.” Although Edward was suffering from an oppressive cold, his speech was judged by Josiah Quincy, a later Harvard president “as fine a performance as has ever been given at a Harvard Commencement” (Quincy, 1896, p. 56; RWE Memorial Association, 1939, p. 149). Edward dazzled them with an unrivaled feat: a brilliant star in the most complex of constellations!
Career Choices: Dreams, Frailties, and Decisions

Edward thinks he is too good for a lawyer
and too bad for a divine

Ralph Waldo Emerson to William Emerson, letter of 10 August 1824; RWE Memorial Association 1939, p.147

After all these accomplishments, Edward faced the choice of a career path. His mother, brothers, aunt, and grandfather were all attentive to his decision. William, pursuing theological studies in Europe at the time, expressed his curiosity. Edward was not inclined to follow Aunt Mary’s wish – the ministry.

Immediately after graduation, Edward began working as a teacher in Roxbury. He did this with great fervor. Even though he had set his mind on becoming a lawyer, he held teaching in high esteem, and left a lasting impression on some of his students, who did not forget his teaching methods.

After six months, Edward began studying law with Daniel Webster, the renowned orator and politician. Pursuing a law career under the tutelage of Webster was viewed by Edward and his close friends as a privilege. Mr. Webster, who was an acquaintance of the Emersons, accepted Edward on his merits and recommendations (Cooke, 1902). Once again, Edward embarked on what promised to be a brilliant path. But, to his misfortune, he continued to battle against a frail body.

In October 1825, and only ten months after beginning his reading of the law, Edward began to show signs of physical illness and mental frailty. His mother and brothers attributed his failing health to excessive work. They agreed to support his travel to Europe for a year to fortify his weak constitution, and Ralph Waldo, assuming parental responsibilities despite his own physical ailments, covered most of the costs. At the time, William had just returned from Europe and was undertaking the study of law, Charles was about to enter Harvard, and Bulkeley needed care; this left Waldo as the only wage earner. In New York, Mrs. Emerson and William saw Edward leave on board the appropriately-named ship, Hope, which headed toward Marseilles (letter of 21 October 1825 EBE and WE New York to RWE Chelmsford; MH bMS Am 1280.226 (193)).

Edward’s letters and journals from Europe document his excursions in Belgium, Holland, France, Italy and England. He seemed to absorb details of people, places, nature, structures, and customs, as exemplified by the description of his stay at Lafayette’s country estate, and seldom mentioned his health issues and personal issues (for example, letter of 11 April 1826 EBE Rome to CCE Cambridge; MH bMS Am 1280.226 (171); journal scraps Emerson Family Papers, MH MS Am 1280.235 (327)). Edward arrived in New York in October 1826 (RWE Memorial Association, 1939), resumed the study of law, and seemed to have the strength to excel again. His studies, as before, were financed by his older brothers and by family friends who extended loans (letter 17 November 1827 EBE Boston to RWE New Bedford).

At the beginning of 1827, Edward had settled into a very demanding routine: “He read law, taught four boys, devoted several hours a day to historical and miscellaneous study, did cataloguing for the Boston Athenaeum, and was ready for other tasks when offered” (Cabot, 1902). He reported being “too busily occupied between the Athenaeum & the Academy to have learned much of current news” (letter of 27 December 1826 EBE Boston to RWE South Carolina; MH bMS Am 1280.226 (195)). That same year he received two invitations from his alma mater that were a tribute to his record of distinction. First, Edward was offered the possibility of a tutorship in Greek and Latin. He declined this invitation because of his commitment and desire to practice the law. The second was an invitation from
President Kirkland to deliver the Master’s English Oration at the 1827 Commencement. He delivered an oration on “The Importance of Efforts for the Diffusion of Knowledge” that was considered a “fine specimen of composition and elocution” and reported in the local press and periodicals as brilliant. Ralph Waldo acknowledged to William the enlightened and sublime passages, but adopted a more critical stance than others in the audience. He wrote “it was spoken with so much deliberation that in my poor thought very much of the effect was lost [...] I anticipated a flaming excitement in mine and popular mind, and if the oration which occupied 36 minutes had been delivered in 15, I think it would have answered its purpose” (letter of 31 August 1827 RWE Memorial Association, 1939, p. 210).

Because Edward lived at Mr. Webster’s household in Boston, the family had occasional contact with him in the spring of 1828. Isolated, subtle changes in behavior, such as noted by Ralph Waldo in the disappointing quality of the Oration, were difficult to piece together. In May 1828 a rapid decline became obvious. Edward confessed to William:

> I read no law – almost no letters. I have ceased to resist GOD & nature; have consented to humor my body & rest my mind; & the consequence is that from the moment of surrender I have been gaining & tho feeble from the struggle of so many years, yet I am wiser, & healthier & happier than ever (letter of 19 May 1828 EBE Boston to WE New York; MHi Ms N-251 (105)).

However, Edward’s “surrender” did not have the salutary effect he expected. On the contrary, on May 25, while staying with his mother at the Old Manse in Concord, he experienced physical and mental collapse: “his frenzy took all forms; sometimes he was very gay […] Afterward would come on a peevish or angry state & he would throw everything in the room & throw his clothes & out the window […] & would roll and twist on the floor with his eyes shut for half an hour” (letter of 3 July 1828 RWE Cambridge to WE New York cited in Bosco & Myerson, 2006, p. 122). He even became aggressive toward Dr. Ripley, his grandfather.

In his darkest moments, Edward elicited an outpouring of support from family and friends. The people of Concord were very kind; the list of those who generously gave their time for Edward’s care underscores the connections and the high esteem in which the Emersons were held among the intellectual elite of New England. Friends and family took turns taking care of him, day and night. As his condition worsened, he required two “watchers” at a time. At the beginning of July it became evident that Edward needed to be institutionalized. After consultation with doctors, family and friends, he was bound with a strap and taken to the McLean Asylum in Charlestown in a hired coach with "the fleetest horse in town" (diary entries 29 June – 2 July 1828 Edward Jarvis’s Diary cited in Bosco & Myerson, 2006, pp. 121-122).

The McLean Asylum for the Insane was known for its ‘moral management’ of patients, that is, humane and gentle treatment. No chains or straightjackets were used, and no patient was restrained without being supervised by a physician (Little, 1972). Edward remained hospitalized for almost five months, from July to December 1828, a time of great emotional and financial stress for the family. Robert Bulkeley was already interned in the same hospital. In addition to witnessing the deterioration and silencing of one of the brightest minds, they were concerned with the cost of the hospitalization. Edward required an individual room (Bosco & Myerson, 2006). He slowly improved, although not without some setbacks. By the end of November it became evident that he could leave the hospital. Ralph Waldo took him to Concord, New Hampshire, for several weeks. Edward was thus present at Waldo’s engagement to Ellen Tucker.
Surprisingly, the two years following release from the hospital were very productive for Edward. He resumed his scholarly and professional activities and recaptured the affectionate interactions with close family members. At the beginning of 1829, he moved back to Concord, Massachusetts, and resumed the study of law. He immediately engaged in multiple activities, pleasing his family and friends; all except Aunt Mary, who worried about a relapse (Bosco & Myerson, 2006). Edward participated in the first winter session of the recently established Concord Lyceum with a lecture on the “Geography of Asia.” According to a witness, “He stood up in the hall over the old Academy, with a large map with a painted outline of Asia upon it, with a wand in his hand, and entranced the attention of the audience” (Alexander, 1919, p. 207; lecture of 25 February 1829 delivered in Concord, MH bMS Am 1280.235 (329)).

Edward became one of the church delegates when Ralph Waldo was ordained as a Unitarian minister in March 1829 (Hoeltje, 1940). Ralph Waldo’s ordination and marriage six months later brought much needed joy to the family. However, happiness was not complete. The young bride, Ellen, became very ill and frail.

Once again Edward demonstrated his resolve to excel and become a lawyer, and obtained licenses to practice in Massachusetts and in New York. By November 1829 he had moved to New York, determined to practice law with William and offer lectures. After a year he was gravely ill, this time from severe pulmonary afflictions, and he had to leave his professional aspirations behind. The doctor insisted that he had to sail south to a warmer climate (Géigel, 2014; Ramírez de Arellano, 2014b). Edward decided to sail to the Caribbean, against the advice of his brothers who believed it more prudent to travel to Boston or to Florida. They were as concerned with his health as with their ability to finance his travels and needs. His mother traveled to New York to persuade Edward against the Caribbean, but got there literally minutes too late.

**Life in the Tropics**

*Farewell, ye lofty spires...*  
*Farewell the busy town...*  
*Farewell, my mother fond...*  
*Farewell, my brothers true...*  
*Farewell, thou fairest one...*  
*To dim New England's shore...*  

E. B. Emerson 1832,  
“The Last Farewell”, in *The Dial*, July 1840.

On December 12, 1830, Edward sailed from New York to St. Croix. Upon arrival, on January 5th, he immediately connected with New England acquaintances that were on the island for health and business. Edward resumed the habit of keeping a journal and writing letters to his close family members, as he had in Andover, Alexandria and Europe. He walked and read extensively, while contrasting the way of life in the Danish island to other places he had visited. His observations, not always favorable toward the life and behaviors of the islands’ inhabitants, included his views on religion, government, customs and traditions (Mayo-Santana, 2014; Simounet, 2014). However, he seemed at ease in his new environment and he appeared to “have no intention of leaving the island immediately” (Journal, 17 March 1831).

Edward stayed in St Croix for three months. He struggled with his pulmonary afflictions and resorted to multiple remedial and self-care regimes to alleviate his symptoms. Tropical natural products, including fruits and vegetables, were incorporated into his care.
routines. He was frequently sick, “prostrated and weak” for days. He constantly reflected on his own fragile condition, especially when he encountered others who came to the tropics as “invalids”. The news of his sister-in-law (Ellen’s) passing, made him think about death, and his feelings on the death of his sister Caroline:

Oh why should tears fill my eyes - all cold as they are used to be. May the Father of life & mercy console the bereaved & prepare us all to die the death of the righteous […] I have not felt the death of any one so much even for a few moments as this of Ellen. I remember my grief at losing our little Caroline. Nature at 8 & 25 is the same. (Journal, 23 February 1831)

Although attentive to his health, Edward was troubled by his financial situation and by the realization of being a burden to family and friends back in New England. Having to continuously ask for monetary support, Edward felt accountable and kept a detailed record of every cent spent (Memorandum book, January-April, 1831; MH bMS Am 1280.235 (333)).

Early in April, 1831, Edward sailed from St. Croix to Puerto Rico. Immediately after landing, he visited the United States consul, Mr. Sidney Mason, a Massachusetts-born businessman who had settled in Puerto Rico, then Spanish territory (Rigau-Pérez, 2014). Mason's reception was hospitable and generous to an extraordinary degree, whether prompted by their personalities, or a letter of introduction, or because a common acquaintance had suggested the meeting to both parties; the journal and letters give no explanation. With the prospect of a job in Mason’s commercial agency, Edward agreed initially to work for food and lodging and that after six months they would renegotiate the arrangements or otherwise he would be free to find another job, possibly in Havana. This initial arrangement suited Edward. He embraced it with optimism and the “desire of remaining in a warm climate & of learning Spanish & of getting acquainted with commerce.” He was eager to “cease to be heavily burdensome to those at home who [are] laden enough.” (letter of 8 May 1831 EBE St John’s Puerto Rico to WE New York; MHi Ms N-251 (189)). With time, he acquired more responsibilities and higher pay in Mason’s establishment, but not the salary he would have liked (Journal, August 3 1831).

Back in New England, his relatives sent frequent, affectionate, inquiring letters. In an early letter Charles wrote “I hope you still gain hope & health. There are many hearts here, Edward, that beat quick for joy, when they hear your welfare” (letter of 12 March 1831 CCE Boston to EBE St. Croix; MH bMS Am 1280.226 (6)). They were interested to learn his intentions for the future, and were also curious about his surroundings, which they deemed exotic. They encouraged him to write and keep a diary. They commented on the possibility of his return, but Edward gave no indication of a formal plan or an urgent desire to move back.

During Edward’s first winter in Puerto Rico, he enjoyed the company of his brother Charles (December 1831 to April 1832). Charles had developed symptoms of consumption and Edward insisted that he come to warmer climates. The visit renewed Edward’s enthusiasm. Upon Charles’ arrival, he wrote in his journal:

Joy, joy in the heart of his brother forlorn.-
How pleasant to find a friend on earth & none on earth that I have found sticketh closer than a brother. A mother is a benefactress, a nurse, a guardian, as well as a friend; but the brother is the friend without the other claims upon love & respect. How pleasant too to find one here who knows what beauty and grandeur are & can make a duet of a song that was ready to cease for want of accompaniment & whose burden was the magnificent scenery & the softness of the climate &c here…(22-23 December 1831)
As anticipated, Edward was able to “talk and walk” with his brother. Their closeness growing up was further deepened by the shared experience in the tropics. Charles, as Edward, observed and commented keenly on customs and traditions. He remarked on slavery, education and religiosity and contrasted them to conditions in New England (Ramírez de Arellano, 2014a). Charles reported in his letter to Dr. Ripley, the step-grandfather, that Puerto Rico was a “place pleasant enough to visit, but not enough to live in.” The letter is full of affirmations of his preference to live in the “North” with its images of the ‘old mansion’, the Sabbath, the Lyceum and a world of “good news & good books” (letter of 15 of January 1832; ALS MH bMS Am 1280.226 (161)). In contrast, Edward’s longings for New England took the form of a past and elusive dream, while his life in the Tropics dominated his present existence.

Edward’s stay in the West Indies was interrupted only once. He went back to New England from August to October 1832. He seemed healthy and in good spirits. While in Boston he visited friends and participated in the family gatherings. He never contemplated staying. He wanted to be back in Puerto Rico for the winter.

Edward sailed to the Caribbean for the second time on October 6th 1832, on what was called a "beautiful brig," the Agnes (letter 9 October 1832 CCE Boston to WE New York; MHi Ms N-251 (265)). He wrote a poem as the Boston harbor faded in the distance, giving the “Last Farewell” to brothers, mother, previous way of living, and to the land where he grew up. With his usual sense of patriotism he promised to pray for his land from the foreign “palmy isle,”

To dim New England's shore,
My heart shall beat not when
I pant for thee no more.
In yon green palmy isle,
Beneath the tropic ray,
I murmur never while
For thee and thine I pray;
Far away, far away.


On his way to Puerto Rico, he stopped in St. Thomas, where he continued to keep a journal. For three days Edward engaged in a busy routine, indicative of his familiarity and high level of comfort with the West Indies environment. He sold goods that he had brought from New England, boarded and ate at a local lodging, fortuitously met Mr. Mason, went with a former classmate for a walk in the mountains, and arranged for the transfer of his parcels to the Niña Bonita (Journal, 29-31 October 1832). He arrived in Puerto Rico on November 2nd, and after two days of quarantine he landed in San Juan (Journal, 2 November 1832). There is no indication that he kept a journal after arriving in Puerto Rico, but he resumed his correspondence with his brothers and mother. Edward continued to study Spanish and became proficient in it, not only for daily life and business, but to read the literary classics and modern books. He also enjoyed the local fairs, music and drama at the theater, and visits to the outskirts of San Juan. He settled again in Mr. Mason’s commercial enterprises, increasingly becoming a close and trusted friend. By 1833, when Mason had to travel, Edward was left in charge of consular affairs. He renegotiated the terms of his salary, but was still not completely satisfied (Memorandum book, 10 May 1833; MH bMS Am 1280.235 (333)). He shared with his brothers that his current situation made him “more than half willing to free [himself] from West Indies engagements.” However, Edward realized that
he was not strong enough to pursue further adventures elsewhere or to face the cold weather of New England. He concluded, “To say that I have talents superior to my station I am not prepared. To say that I feel myself exactly in the niche ordained for me, I am less so” (letter 27 July 1833 EBE Puerto Rico to CCE NP; MH bMS Am 1280.226 (173)).

Through correspondence, Edward stayed informed of the political developments of New England and the intimate affairs of his family and friends. On more than one occasion, the brothers, especially Ralph Waldo, indicated their desire for him to be back. By the spring of 1834, Ralph Waldo proposed the possibility of a retreat in a cottage in the Berkshires, in western Massachusetts. Edward did not completely dismiss the offer but hinted that he “may at least come a welcome pilgrim visitor from time to time, - and repose & repent & learn & unlearn as need may be” in Ralph Waldo’s “philosophic & religious shades” (letter 7 July 1834 EBE Puerto Rico to RWE Boston; MH bMS Am 1280.226 (223)). Edward had been severely sick since the beginning of 1834 and he must have thought of his impending death. His letters became less frequent and, in an indirect way, he made his family aware of the severity of his pain and discomfort. His energy was fading and he described himself as “less fat, less robust, less comely than other men;” however he tried not to imagine the extent or probable duration of his infirmities (letter 3 June 1834 EBE Puerto Rico to RWE Boston; MH bMS Am 1280.226 (221)).

A Star in a Constellation Afar

Qui in me fidem habet, ille quamvis mortuus est, vivet
(Who has faith in me, even though he is dead, shall live)
Inscription in Edward Emerson’s tombstone, Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, Concord, MA

In August 1834 Edward became ill after exposure to a rainstorm, a “wetting which increased his cough.” By September 27, he was prostrate in his chambers. His close friend and doctor, Francis Armstrong, attended him until his death in the early hours of the 1st of October. Edward died surrounded by Mr. Mason and his family. Perhaps to allow for a dignified funeral and burial, Mr. Mason arranged that Edward receive the Roman Catholic last rites (Rigau-Pérez, 2014).

A procession of friends took the body from the cathedral to the cemetery of Santa Magdalena, between the city walls and the Atlantic Ocean (Bosco & Myerson, 2006). Many came to mourn Edward. Mr. Mason wrote to the family: “I am happy to say that the city of Porto Rico never has shown to a stranger the respect that has been shown to my deceased friend” (letter 8 October 1834, cited by Bosco & Myerson, 2006 p. 143). Edward had become a star in a constellation afar.

In New England, the tidings about Edward's passing provoked great sorrow among the family. His friends poured heart-felt expressions of grief into eulogies that captured the zeal, tensions, and brilliancy of how he lived, and showed the profound feelings that he elicited in others. The Emersons sent a marble tablet to cover the tomb in San Juan until his ashes could be moved to Massachusetts. At some point, the tablet was returned to the family, but there is no documentation of the final resting place for Edward's remains. The tombstone is still placed in the Emerson lot in the Sleepy Hollow Cemetery in Concord (Bosco & Myerson, 2006).
References


**Author Note**

The author is a graduate of Mount Holyoke College (psychology and education). She has a master’s and doctorate in higher education administration and social policy from Harvard University. She has worked in curricular innovation and faculty development programs in the health sciences. She participates in a wide range of funded and sponsored research projects. She has published in the areas of public health and health promotion.
workforce development, mentoring, research capacity building, and sociobehavioral aspects of drug use.

Institutional affiliation: Nova Southeastern University College of Pharmacy, and University of Puerto Rico Graduate School of Public Health

Contact Information: 3200 South University Drive, Ft Lauderdale FL 33328
Telephone: 954 262 1095; E-mail: rabionet@nova.edu

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Ideology and Etiology in the Treatment of Edward Bliss Emerson’s Pulmonary Consumption

Annette B. Ramírez de Arellano
University of Puerto Rico, San Juan, Puerto Rico USA

Although Edward Bliss Emerson’s life had unusual promise, his death was quite ordinary: he died of pulmonary consumption, which accounted for one in five deaths in the 1830s. He went to the West Indies in search of a more healthful climate, and sought it in St. Croix and Puerto Rico. But his quest was short-lived, and he died in 1834 at the age of 29. Because there was no consensus on the cause of consumption, treatment for the condition varied widely, and included a number of nostrums and therapies that may be considered “self-care.” Edward adopted a series of practices that he documented in his journal, therefore providing us with the range of lifestyle interventions and other therapies that were seen as desirable, and the belief systems informing these at the time. These practices ranged from the medically-sanctioned to the highly personal and idiosyncratic, and suggest a variety of holistic approaches to addressing an illness for which there was no “magic bullet.” Keywords: Tuberculosis, Medical Practices, Narrative Medical Record, Puerto Rico, St. Croix, Edward Bliss Emerson

Edward Bliss Emerson’s life was filled with unusual intellectual opportunities and promise, but ended in a death that was quite ordinary at the time. He died of pulmonary consumption, a broad rubric that included illnesses now variously labeled as asthma, lung cancer, and tuberculosis, among others (Ott, 1996). In the 1830s, pulmonary consumption was the principal cause of mortality in the United States and accounted for one in every five deaths (Rothman, 1994).

Emerson’s journal provides an eyewitness account of how the condition was dealt with by well-trained physicians and educated patients during the first half of the 19th century. Journals have been called “letters to oneself” and Emerson’s is certainly that. In addition to jotting down his activities and the topics which he would describe more fully in his letters, Edward described his symptoms and health, and how he addressed these. The journal can therefore be read as a narrative medical record, providing insight into the prevailing etiological views at a time “when the disease seemed to threaten the well-born and the gifted” (Hays, 1998, p. 157). And because Emerson had access to the best physicians in New York and Boston, we can track what these doctors prescribed for the condition. These sources therefore illuminate belief systems and how they translated into medical practice among both practitioners and patients.

Interestingly, Edward never uses the word “consumption” to describe his condition. Perhaps because of the stigma attached to the illness, he writes of a “bad cold” or a “cough” and pain on the side, and never self-identifies as a consumptive even when he assigns the label to others. Still, the measures he took against the condition were identified with the

1 Edward B. Emerson’s Caribbean journal and letters can be accessed online at http://bibliotecadigital.uprrp.edu/cdm/ref/collection/librosraros/id/1701. Unless otherwise specified, his letters from that period can be found in that text. Permissions to quote from Edward Emerson’s journal and letters have been granted by the Ralph Waldo Emerson Memorial Association and Houghton Library, Harvard University, and the Massachusetts Historical Society, and are gratefully acknowledged.
treatment of consumption, and illustrate some of the prevailing treatments used to cure or assuage the condition.

Belief Systems and Medical Interventions

Emerson’s life preceded the era of the germ theory and specific etiology, when each health condition was expected to have a single agent that could be addressed through an effective specific intervention or “magic bullet.” What we now label as tuberculosis was then a condition of unknown cause and uncertain diagnosis. Symptoms included weight loss, fever, coughing and expectoration (Ott, 1996). Many factors were seen as causing, contributing to, or exacerbating the condition, and these gave rise to a number of equally varied interventions. With no effective or definite cure, patients had an array of treatments from which to choose. The sick could therefore cobble together their own regimens. “Every man his own doctor” (Tennent, 1734) was not only the title of a popular health manual, but a reality for most: self-care was the most prevalent way to cope with illness and disease.

Despite this patient-centered regimen, it was the individual’s context rather than his/her body that was the main focus of treatment against consumption. Therapies addressed the environment in which patients lived, how and where they worked, and a number of habits or factors that would now be grouped under the rubric of “lifestyle.” Edward kept good accounts of these interventions, allowing us to examine both the causal explanations of the illness and the strategies to deal with it.

Blistering

Edward, like his brothers, had suffered previous episodes of “chest weakness,” and had experience with the customary treatments for acute illnesses. Among these was blistering. Deliberately causing a blister on the skin was a broad-spectrum remedy, used for many purposes and conditions. Blistering operated as a general stimulant; it acted to remove fluid directly from the body into the blister fluid, and to “relieve torpor” by diverting blood from the affected part to the part where the blister was applied. It also acted as a counter-irritant, to reduce the irritability of the blood vessels in patients with severe fevers, or to stimulate the vascular and nervous tissues in adjacent anatomical areas (Estes, 1990). In New York, Emerson had been blistered by a physician (letter from Charles C. Emerson to Ezra Ripley, 4 December 1830, Bosco & Myerson, 2006, p. 131) and later self-medicated. But whereas his doctor had used cerate, a poultice made of lard or oil and wax, as a dressing, now Edward Caribbeanized the treatment to use a local product: the blister was dressed after 10 hours with a banana leaf. This he described as “more painful in first application, more easy after a night’s continuance than the cerate dressing” (Journal, 5 January 1831).

The “Climate Cure”

The prevailing medical orthodoxy was that consumption was associated with cold, harsh climates and that milder temperatures and greater access to the outdoors was salutary (Rothman, 1994). But physicians’ opinions varied, as did their prescriptions. Some recommended leaving densely-populated cities for the countryside, in the belief that distance from the putrefying effect of miasmas would benefit the patient. Samuel Sheldon Fitch, (1850), owner of a patent medicine company and author of a treatise on lung diseases (among other books on subjects related to invalids), felt that it was the change of place itself that made a difference. Henry I. Bowditch (1869), first president of the Massachusetts State Board of Health and president of the American Medical Association, advised: “Whenever in doubt
Voyages were considered to be healthful and ocean journeys were considered particularly promising (Bowditch). The sea was seen as “magical and medicinal” (Rothman, 1994, p. 34): high winds, the briny sea air, and the rocking motion of the waves were all regarded as invigorating (Fitch, 1850). The Transcendentalists, who believed that there were spiritual lessons to be learned from nature, were particularly wedded to the idea of consumptives moving to open areas in which they could meditate on nature’s gifts and be protected from cold weather (Ott, 1996).

Among the Emersons, there was no clear consensus about where Edward should seek care in 1830. Although some thought he should travel, the family’s resources were strained, and a trip represented a major expenditure. Writing to his brother William, Ralph Waldo expressed his misgivings: “It would be a pity to send him alone and friendless to a place where he shall be embarrassed by what he will think unreasonable charges” (Letter from Ralph Waldo Emerson to William Emerson, 3 December 1830, in Rusk, 1966, p. 312). Instead, Waldo recommended that Edward remain in Massachusetts, where his mother and siblings would be able to “roll him up in a hot blanket… to hibernate in a chamber by a coal fire” (Letter from Ralph Waldo Emerson to William Emerson, 5 December 1830, in Rusk, p. 312). Waldo convinced his mother and siblings that Edward should not go south, and she traveled to New York to stop him from embarking to the West Indies. But she encountered bad weather and arrived too late to intervene in her son’s plans: Edward’s ship sailed half an hour before she arrived in New York (Letter from Ralph Waldo Emerson to Ezra Ripley, 15 December 1830, in Rusk, 1966, p. 313).

Edward’s “voyage for health” was part of a trend. In the United States in the early 1800s, invalids tended to go to Florida and to several mineral spas. For consumptives from New England, however, health-seeking often meant traveling to the Caribbean (see Géigel, 2014). In the words of Rothman (1994):

By the 1830s it was as simple to arrange to sail from Boston to Havana as from Boston to Portland. Nor was it difficult to find accommodations on ships heading to the West Indies… (p. 32)

St. Croix, where Edward first settled, was a favored destination, because the bustling sugar trade required frequent trips between Boston and what was then the Danish West Indies (see Géigel, 2014; Rigau, 2014). Moreover, St. Croix provided relatively easy access to other islands in the Caribbean, where the presumed benefits of trade winds and tropical weather were assured. Indeed, in the West Indies Edward found the “purity of atmosphere” (Journal, 4 September 1831) he was seeking. He thus described the difference in the climates and lifestyles in the two places:

The art of living is a nice one, but a less laborious art by far in this climate than in the north, consisting here rather in preserving the even tone and natural temperament of the system, while there we are called upon to resist attacks & to repair the battered frame. (Journal, 4 September 1831)

Months later, when his brother Charles fell ill with symptoms similar to his own, Edward suggested that he join him in Puerto Rico to benefit from the salubrious environment where he could “warm himself by nature’s fires” (Journal, 26 November 1831):

It is a medicine of such a generous and pleasant as well as potent nature, the passage from a cold to a warm atmosphere, that if the system be not rotten & totally unstrung, restoration appears to be probable. (Journal, 17 November 1831)
Occupational Health

In addition to climate, the patient’s immediate occupation and social environment were also subject to intervention. Consumption was associated with excessive work or study, and choosing the proper trade or profession was considered an important element in “the future weal or woe of the youth just commencing life” (Bowditch, 1869, p. 69). Occupations that cramped the chest or that produced inaction of the entire body were therefore to be avoided (Bowditch). Certain careers were considered “irritating” to the body and soul and therefore disease-promoting; these included the law, ministry, and teaching (Rothman, 1994), precisely the areas in which the Emersons toiled. Moreover, they tended to overextend themselves, a trait that Ralph Waldo called “ill weaved ambition” and the family’s “leprosy” (Bosco & Myerson, 2006, p. 115). And Edward, who was high-strung and whose intellectual ambition “scared his elders,” (Bosco & Myerson, p. 53) was particularly susceptible to the family malady.

In marked contrast to the Emersons’ expectation of academic striving and success (Emerson, 1949), some physicians cautioned against encouraging youths to over-achieve in school, believing that the stimulus of “prizes to be won” and “honors to be carried off” would affect a child’s nervous system and deplete his body (Bowditch, 1869). The result of such striving, warned one, would be “men... in the ranks of the melancholy sermonizers, or dyspeptic lawyers” (Bowditch, p. 80). Edward, who had suffered an episode of severe mental illness while he was preparing for a career in the law (see Rabionet, 2014), now deliberately sought to avoid any mentally-challenging work; in his words, he had developed an almost-constant “aversion to intellectual labor” (Journal, 6 March 1831).

In the West Indies, the New England networks into which the Emersons were tied most likely facilitated Edward’s finding employment in Puerto Rico; the transplanted sick often had letters of introduction to American consuls and other compatriots (Rothman, 1994). Edward met Sidney Mason, who offered him a job as an accounting clerk and legal copyist in San Juan (Bosco & Myerson, 2006). Mason was part of the merchant and political aristocracy of Gloucester, Massachusetts (Biographical Sketches, 1908). He had left for Boston at the age of 12, found a job from which he could advance, and was promoted to an important clerkship. In 1820, at the age of 21, he went as supercargo to the West Indies, settling in San Juan the same year. Over the next decade, he acquired a wife and family as well as extensive property that allowed him to lead an “opulent lifestyle” (Worley, 1980). By the time Edward arrived in Puerto Rico in 1831, Mason owned a luxurious house in San Juan and had interests in large sugar plantations elsewhere on the island (Baralt, 1992). In 1829 he had been appointed US consul in San Juan by President Andrew Jackson. Emerson became Mason’s secretary, the young man agreeing to carry out both consular and business duties in exchange for food and lodging over the course of six months, after which the contract would be renegotiated (Journal, 10 May 1833).

Emerson’s job in Puerto Rico was the type that would now be labeled “low demand, high control,” thus minimizing stress. He translated, wrote letters, and handled accounts. Because he had trained to be an attorney, Edward was somewhat apologetic about the downward mobility his new job entailed. But it was part of his therapy, and he found the “mercantile profession” less exhausting than his previous work because it did not require the “strain and effort” of the legal profession (Letter from Edward B. Emerson to William Emerson, 17 July 1831).

Emerson had a flexible schedule and time to care for himself. He attended social functions, played chess, took Spanish lessons, and taught English. He made a variety of
excursions on foot and horseback, read much, and was a diligent correspondent, thus providing us with good accounts of his self-care.

**Lifestyle Prescriptions: Diet, Exercise, Smoking, Friction, and Creature Comforts**

Because consumption was a constitutional disease (i.e., it involved the whole body), its treatment was similarly holistic. Many aspects of lifestyle, from calisthenics to clothing, were involved. Diet, exercise, smoking, and “friction” (massage) were all part of Edward’s routine. He had been a methodical youth, with a regular schedule and stringent habits (Bosco & Myerson, 2006), and he now followed those practices that he considered good for his health.

Consumption was a wasting disease characterized by weight loss. Patients were therefore usually urged to adopt a high-calorie diet to replace their losses; fats and creams were considered desirable. Physicians also counseled patients to eat plenty of fruits and vegetables, as these would regulate bodily functions. While Edward followed the latter recommendation, he put himself on a relatively strict diet with minimal calories. He saw other patients recover as a result of “the climate and by abstemious living” and decided to follow their lead. Emerson was intent on doing everything in moderation and not taking undue advantage of the islands’ bountiful nature:

> We have only to guard against excesses either in exercise or sleep or meats or fruits or drinks. These three latter are so abundant, & the appetite so good, that doubtless caution is necessary, still nature seems to me to help us through our slight imprudences more easily here than in the cold country. (Journal, 4 September 1831)

One of Emerson’s symptoms was painful spasms on his right side, and he felt these were exacerbated when he ate a heavy meal. While in St. Croix, he began restricting his food intake:

> I have thought myself better for the experiment of 8 or 9 days, taking nothing with my cup of tea in the morning & so eating only at 12 a light lunch and a pretty good vegetable & fruit dinner at 4 & omitting the old indulgence of tea & taking a glass of sugar & water instead at 7 or 8 […] I look to my side as the regulator of my diet, having found that a very hearty meal was followed by a greater sensitiveness or positiveness of pain in that quarter. (Letter from Edward B. Emerson to William Emerson, 19 February 1831)

In fact, Emerson was so concerned with overeating, that he adopted “Cornaro’s rule,” which limited daily intake to 12 ounces of solid foods and 14 ounces of liquid. This diet had been prescribed by an Italian nobleman and writer whose life straddled the 15th and 16th centuries (Cornaro, 1916). Cornaro, who advocated these restrictions as a pathway towards a long and healthy life, made concessions to invalids, for whom the amounts of food and drink were increased to 16 ounces of solid food and 24 ounces of liquid. Although lacking a scale with which to weigh his food, Emerson estimated his intake in an attempt to follow Cornaro’s recommendations:

> I am trying a more regular system of diet […], banishing … articles which though very palatable to me are universally condemned by the medical writers --- such as pastry, preserves, fried vegetables, even my favorite rice cakes, etc., also beans and peas (when potato and bread can be had), taking much less
sweet, molasses, etc. and more bread than heretofore. At breakfast I am trying a boiled egg with bread or toast, making about 2 to 3 oz. in all --- then luncheon of bread and fruit say 2 to 3 oz. with a cup of gruel --- then dinner of about 6 to 8 oz. of solid bread or vegetable or the solid fruits like banana & I consider as liquid the juice of a bit of shaddock or orange or a little thin soup. (Journal, 1 March 1831)

Despite this restrictive diet, Edward gained 10 pounds during his first 10 months in Puerto Rico. Because he had started out at a mere 97 pounds, the gain represented a significant increase to his body weight (Letter from Edward B. Emerson to William Emerson, 11 February 1832). Moreover, he later benefited from the dozen bottles of sherry and Madeira wine sent by his brother Charles, who apparently saw these as healthful “restoratives” (Letter from Charles C. Emerson to Edward B. Emerson, 6 March, 1834, Houghton Library, bMS Am 1280.226 (19)).

Emerson was as disciplined about exercising as he was about diet. He followed medical advice which counseled that “the consumptive’s […] main object must be to improve his general health by active exercise in the open air, and a complete abstinence from all drugs and nostrums” (Stranger in the Tropics, 1868, p. 30). Edward favored horseback-riding, which was recommended for consumptives because it aroused their vitality (Ott, 1996). He also took long hikes and walks, and stayed on a regular schedule, which some physicians favored (Fitch, 1850). On rainy days, he practiced gymnastics in his “little cell” (Journal, 5 July 1831).

He maintained this routine, even when it was not favored by his physician in Puerto Rico. Emerson talked to a Dr. Jorro about disorders of the chest, only to learn that the doctor considered walking and horseback riding to be very bad for chest complaints, recommending hammock-swinging and sailing instead. With a hint of exasperation, Edward could only say “Oh how Doctors differ!” (Journal, 11 December 1831).

Smoking was another habit to which Emerson paid attention, although he was quite idiosyncratic in his consideration of the practice. Although more than 120 years would elapse before research documented the causal links between smoking and a number of diseases, especially lung cancer, some physicians in the early 19th century were already sounding the alarm against smoking. Benjamin Rush, the most influential medical practitioner in the United States during Edward’s early years, was a forceful enemy of tobacco, which he called a “vile weed” (1806). Edward, however, regarded smoking as possibly beneficial, and indulged in the habit, albeit with limits.

He had smoked intermittently and resumed the habit when he arrived in St. Croix, considering cigar smoking “rather serviceable in some respects” (Journal, 18 April 1832). But he recognized the practice also had serious disadvantages and decided to abstain from cigars for a month to test if this might “be useful to [his] mind and body.” He found the experiment worth doing, but was not convinced that “smoking [was] a foolish or pernicious thing” (Journal, 18 April 1832). He returned to smoking cigars, and tried to repeat the abstinence experiment two months later. This trial was short-lived: after not smoking for one day, he resumed the habit (Journal, 21-25 July 1832).

Another element of Emerson’s health routine was “friction” or massage. In keeping with the belief that any kind of massage would be stimulating and revitalizing to consumptives, Edward gave himself a rubdown twice daily, for 15 minutes each time (Journal, 1 March 1832). This routine was part of hydrotherapy, or the use of water for healing. Consumptives were advised to rub their chests well with a cotton or linen towel using cold water, which was supposed to impart its ‘tonic power’ to the patient (Fitch, 1850).
In Puerto Rico, Emerson discovered the medicinal uses of bay rum, which he felt “remove[d] all chilliness and probably prevent[ed] a severe cold” (Journal, 17 December 1831).

These health routines were accompanied by two key comforts: proper clothing and a good mattress. Edward requested that his brothers send him these items, both of which were part of his therapy. With respect to clothes, the general rule was that looser and lighter was better (Bowditch, 1869). Too much clothing was “inclined to debilitate the system and lead to effeminacy;” it was therefore desirable “to wear as little as possible consistently with comfort” (Fitch, 1850, p. 52). Similarly, the surface on which consumptives slept was recommended to be “firm and hard,” luxurious feather and down being seen as strength-depleting (Fitch).

The Outcome in Question

Despite these treatments, or perhaps because of them, Emerson was not able to conquer his illness. Towards the end of 1833, Edward gave his brother Ralph Waldo a brief report on his condition. He continued to cough, and feared that (from his words in French) “the angel’s arrow” had “pierced too deeply” (Letter from Edward B. Emerson to Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1-3 November 1833). By June 1834, Edward wrote that his health was the same as it had been “for years” (Letter from Edward B. Emerson to Ralph Waldo Emerson, 3 June 1834). Three months later, Edward’s condition worsened; no longer able to self-medicate, he saw a physician summoned by Sidney Mason (Bosco & Myerson, 2006). The doctor relied on one of the basic tools of the medical armamentarium at the time, bleeding, which was believed to calm the body when the patient had an accelerated pulse (Estes 1990). Edward died the following day, October 1, 1834.

Because history has no control groups, we do not know if a different set of interventions would have prolonged or shortened Emerson’s life. Although some patients overcame the disease, consumption most often resulted in death. The therapies Edward adopted were a combination of the physician-sanctioned and the quirky and counter-intuitive. While we do not know if they were effective, they most likely had a placebo effect, enhanced his self-efficacy, and added life to years, if not years to life.

Almost 50 years after Edward Bliss Emerson’s death, consumption would be attributed to bacilli and the disease would be relabeled as tuberculosis. But the discovery of a specific agent and scientific proof that the disease was transmitted from person to person did not end the arguments concerning causality, nor did they provide clear guidelines with respect to treatment. The idea that the disease was contagious was rejected by sanitarians who remained committed to multicausal explanations of disease and comprehensive measures that addressed what we now call the “social determinants of health.” Contagionism also clashed with the interests of political authorities. If the disease was contagious, those afflicted would have to be isolated in order to avoid general outbreaks. Who would decide, and who would pay? In addition, contagionism threatened the interests of the medical establishment, as key decisions would be made by public health officers rather than private physicians (Hays, 1998). For all these reasons, the earlier ideas of disease causation undergirding Emerson’s therapies continued to be discussed and enacted for some time. Emerson’s diary therefore sheds light on issues that involve the intersection between ideology and etiology. And Edward’s holistic yet patient-centered approach to illness has once again gained currency, as “magic bullets” remain elusive for some of the major causes of mortality and morbidity that afflict us today (Spector, 2011). Broad-based, multi-pronged approaches therefore still resonate in deciding what interventions are worth pursuing, and for whom.
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Author Note

Annette B. Ramírez de Arellano is a graduate of Mount Holyoke College (political science), Yale University (city planning), the University of Puerto Rico (health planning), and the Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University (health policy). She has worked in academe and with public health organizations, and is the author of books and articles on health policy and the history and practice of public health.

Institutional affiliation: University of Puerto Rico Graduate School of Public Health

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to:
anette@ramirezdearellano.com

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Article Citation

Edward Bliss Emerson, the Medical Tourist

Wilfredo A. Géigel
University of the Virgin Islands St. Croix Campus, St. Croix, US Virgin Islands USA

Traveling for health reasons was not an unusual event for wealthy and well-to-do members of society both in North America and Europe in the early 19th century. Edward Bliss Emerson is an example of those who traveled for health reasons. Books and newspapers at that time, like today, incited the infirm to travel to far-away places where the climate and the surroundings would take care of their ills. This essay will look at medical tourism, especially in the Caribbean, as seen through the eyes of Edward Emerson. Keywords: Tuberculosis, Medical tourism, Medical practices, Puerto Rico, St. Croix, Edward Bliss Emerson

Introduction

Edward Bliss Emerson, a younger brother of Ralph Waldo Emerson, would now be called a medical tourist. The term medical tourism is a modern day description within the travel industry for people who live in one country and travel to another to receive medical, surgical or dental care for either personal or financial reasons (Connell, 2011). Some insurance companies provide foreign coverage for specialty treatments because of the less expensive procedures in other countries. A recent survey sponsored by the United Nations, for example, indicated that in 2002, over 600,000 persons traveled to Bangkok and Phuket, Thailand, and 150,000 persons traveled to India in search of medical attention (Paffhausen, Peguero, & Roche Villareal, 2010, pp. 16-17). This has created global, multi-industry commercial interests, as evidenced by the existence of a not-for-profit trade association for providers of medical tourism and health care, medical travel facilitators, insurance companies and related institutions. Members and potential patients can keep informed through regularly published magazines, newsletters and other promotional information (Medical Tourism Magazine, n.d.).

In Edward Emerson’s time, the wealthy and the well-to-do could afford Grand (or less-than-grand) Tours in Europe and the United States, in order to experience different cultures, and at times, to seek a climate to improve their health. But medical tourism was not a novelty during that period; the concept dates to antiquity. More than two thousand years earlier, people traveled around the Mediterranean to Epidaurus, in the Grecian Peloponnese, to the sanctuary in the alleged birthplace of Aesculapius, god of healing and son of Apollo. In Augustan times (44 B.C. – 69 A.D.), tourism on the Roman coastline was as much about recreation as about self realization, or relaxation, recuperation and health restoration (Connell, 2011). The journey itself was sometimes considered as possibly a treatment (Lomine, 2005). Aulus Cornelius Celsus (25 B.C. – 50 A.D.), the medical authority of his times (and for more than a millennium) wrote in De medicina: “in case of phthisis [tuberculosis], if the patient has the strength, a long sea voyage and change of air is called for...” (Celsus, 1971, p. 72). This was still considered valid advice in the nineteenth century.

1 Edward B. Emerson's Caribbean journal and letters can be accessed online at http://bibliotecadigital.uprrp.edu/cdm/ref/collection/librosraros/id/1701. Unless otherwise specified, his letters from that period can be found in that text. Permissions to quote from Edward Emerson's journal and letters have been granted by the Ralph Waldo Emerson Memorial Association and Houghton Library, Harvard University, and the Massachusetts Historical Society, and are gratefully acknowledged.
Edward was the most physically frail of the Emerson brothers, and in his short life suffered several health crises that forced him to take refuge in different locations in the United States and Europe (see Rabionet, 2014). In 1830 he moved from Boston to New York, where he worked and resided with his brother William, but he developed a severe pulmonary inflammation. According to a letter from brother Charles to grandfather Ezra Ripley, dated December 4, 1830:

Dr. Perkins, their best physician in N. Y. was called in – he applied a blister immediately – but said that Edward ought to go off directly, to the South. Since then we have had more letters – Edw. remains much the same – his cough is bad – ‘his strength, weakness’ – Dr. Perkins repeats his advice – and Edward is going away as soon as necessary arrangements be made… (Bosco & Myerson, 2006, p. 131)

The treating physician was Dr. Cyrus Perkins, a graduate of Dartmouth College, and a friend of William Emerson (Rusk, 1939/1966). His methods fall within the acceptable standards for the treatment of “consumption” (tuberculosis) at the time. The choice of treatment, particularly long sea voyages, was outlined in at least two well-known publications, Recherches sur la phthisie pulmonaire, written by Gaspard L. Bayle and published in Paris in 1810, and An inaugural dissertation on pulmonary consumption, written by Dr. Edward Delafield, published in New York in 1816 (see also Ramírez de Arellano, 2014).

**Why St. Croix?**

Unfortunately, Edward does not explain in his journal why he chose St. Croix, which would seem at first sight a surprising location for treatment. St. Croix, just off the arch of the Caribbean islands, is located 40 miles south of St. Thomas and 70 miles southeast of Puerto Rico. It was then a Danish possession and a major sugar production center in the region. The popularity of St. Croix with visitors from the States, particularly those from the northeast, may have a simple explanation. The United States was the largest source of North American commerce for the island since the second half of the eighteenth century. Connecticut had its share of merchants... who could afford to send and hire captains or younger members of the family to St. Croix with orders as to business operations. The greatest percentage of North American merchants, who had business contracts with the Danish West Indies ... were from Philadelphia. (Willis, 1963, p. 93)

Several well-known families such as the Kortrights, Angers, Beekman, Lynseus and Van Cortlands of New York and the Whites and Yards of Philadelphia, carried on the major portion of commerce for the North Americans at Christiansted and Fredericksted. “They were usually assisted by the local residents, [who were] related members of the family who sought their fortune in the Caribbean” (Willis, 1963, p. 94). This is confirmed by Edward's brother Charles, when he asks in a letter “Do you see Dr. C. and Mrs. Richard Derby? & others … I name Northern Emigrants to make you feel that you are in a large company of friends” (Charles Chauncy to Edward, Feb.1, 1831, as cited in Bosco & Myerson, 2006, pp. 132-133). The journal entries identify additional people Edward knew from the States or with whom he becomes acquainted during his extended walks or rides to various estates.

The island, according to a visitor, had
not inaptly been styled ‘the Garden of the West Indies’, on account of its superior cultivation, beautiful homes and its fertility. Its scenery is extremely varied and possesses great interest to the student of nature and those who care to make it a health resort. (Taylor, 1888, p. 183)

Another traveler, a Lt. Brady, the brother of the plantation manager of Estate Manning’s Bay, published Observations upon the State of Negro Slavery in London in 1829 and said of the island:

its comparative salubrity is much vaunted by its inhabitants, and probably with reason, for there are no features in its topography that are particularly unfavorable to health…. During the first six months of the year, the climate is considered favorable to consumptive patients, by some of whom it is frequently resorted from the United States. (Brady, 1996, p. 110)

“The island is endeared to me”, wrote Sylvester Hovey, in 1838, “by the recollection of its balmy climate and beautiful scenery -- by many kindnesses received when I was in a condition most highly to appreciate them, and by the refined and generous hospitality, uniformly showed to my countrymen, who have gone there for health” (Hovey, 1838, p. 37-38). In another passage, he expressed:

St. Croix is justly considered the most delightful of the West India islands. In its natural fertility, beauty of scenery, salubrity of climate and in the facilities for traveling it yields to no other. The invalid, who goes there to escape the rigors of a northern winter, will find not only a balmy atmosphere and a profusion of the ordinary luxuries of tropical countries, but, what is more to a ‘a stranger in a strange land,’ the sympathy of warm and generous hearts and a noble hospitality. (Hovey, 1838, p. 24)

The island’s “salubrity” could also be observed in its inhabitants, if local physician reports to government were reliable. The term “consumption” appeared in their annual reports only in reference to the “invalids” from North America who started visiting St. Croix in the 1830s. There is no reference to this term regarding the local population (Jensen, 2012, p. 93). In contrast, the island received so many invalids in search of better health that the influx fostered an economic sector of the activities necessary to take care of the needs of the visitors: transportation, housing, service, medical care, and of course, publications for prospective visitors.

**The Care of Invalids in St. Croix**

A contemporary of Edward’s, whom we know only by his pseudonym, “Invalid”, published A Winter in the West Indies and Florida (1839), provided information on the charges for medical attention and compared prices with those of New York: the price of bread was doubled; fresh pork was good and cheap (only ten cents a pound); poultry in general was indifferent, but 33% less expensive. Board cost ten dollars a week, and washing cost about the same as in New York. “Invalid” described the quantity and conditions of boarding houses and their occupants as follows:

There were six boarding-houses here [Frederiksted], entertaining in all about seventy American boarders, about one half of whom were invalids, and the
residue their husbands, wives or companions; of course, every house was filled to overflowing. [...] The great number of invalids makes it seem more like a hospital than a boarding-house, and nervous people are not at all benefited by having so many patients before their eyes, hearing the stories of their sufferings and sympathising in their despair. A person, however, who is not alarmed at beholding hard cases of disease, will find some, if not all, of these boarding houses very comfortable…” (Invalid, 1839, pp. 54-55)

This crowding is demonstrated by some of the published journals written more or less contemporaneously with Edward’s visit to St. Croix. One writer declared: “I found myself one of thirty passengers, all but seven of whom were seeking, in a milder climate, that boon without which life is bereft of its chief enjoyments” (Weed, 1866, p. 315). Another related: “Our ship’s company consisted of about 20 individuals (mostly in search of warmer climate and better health) who had taken the passage, in this accommodating little ship, for Santa Cruz” (Gurney, 1840, p. 4).

During the 1830s there were at least four packet boats with service from New York to St. Croix. These were the brig Eliza, under Captain Lockwood, which was owned by De Forest & Co., the proprietor of two plantations in St. Croix; the Camilla with Captain Watlington, which carried about twenty passengers; the Cornelia, with capacity for fifty passengers, which made a 9 or 10 day crossing (however, the sailing could last up to 18 or 20 days); the ship Emily, under Captain Davis, which was owned by Aymar & Co. of New York (mentioned in Edward's journal, 14 November 1831). The Emily and the Eliza were known to make five or six voyages annually. There was also the brig Rosalie, which regularly sailed from Philadelphia to St. Croix. An occasional schooner sailed from Norfolk (Virginia), Savannah (Georgia) or Wilmington (North Carolina) (Weed, 1866, p. 340).

If the climate was a factor and there were close ties to the island and the eastern seaboard, the fact that there were numerous eminent physicians on the island must have been a consideration to move there in search of health. Hans West, in his Account of St. Croix, written in 1799, stated that some of the traders were men of science. “Among the latter I know ten mostly residents of plantations, who are educated doctors and have more or less active practice” (West, 2004, p. 64). He mentioned Dr. John Paul Pflug, who was born in Prussia, studied surgery in Copenhagen, and practiced medicine in the city of Kiel, in Holstein, until he moved to St. Croix, where he died. There was Dr. Thomas, born in St. Christopher and raised in Scotland before studying medicine in Copenhagen and becoming a physician in 1789 (Willis, 1963, p. 39). There was also a Dr. Clarkstone, about who little is known. West mentioned that in the case of illness, remedies could be found as in a location of similar size elsewhere. In addition to numerous doctors who resided on their own plantations, and who confined their practice primarily to those plantations and their friends, the town of Christiansted boasted of men who had excelled at the medical schools of Europe. Each of these doctors had his own pharmacy, from which he provided to their patients’ needs.

“Invalid” expressed his concerns for the increasing number of “pulmonary complaints in the United States,” and addressed the need for an appropriate climate for “invalids,” as patients of tuberculosis or consumption, were called. The preface states:

Within a few years past, many eminent physicians have been urging their patients to go to the West Indies, and many have pursued the advice with decided advantage... The author of this little volume, after having suffered the effects of northern winters for several years ... was induced, by the strong recommendation of his physicians, and the increased severity of his disease, in the early part of the winter of 1838-39, to visit the island of St. Croix, which
was supposed to be the best of the West Indies for climate…” (Invalid, 1839, pp. vii-viii)

This anonymous author provided his readers with important information regarding facilities and medical care in St. Croix, which he described as “the very best [that] can be procured”, insofar as there were “several eminent physicians residing there.” He specifically mentioned a Dr. William Stedman (1764-1844), who initially went to the island for his health at the age of eighteen and was then “hardy and robust at the age of about sixty” (Invalid, 1839, p. 54). According to research on the health of the enslaved population, Dr. Stedman was the only physician who mentioned “invalids” in his annual medical report to government. “He seems to have been a prominent physician who made it his specialty to treat this group of people” (Niklas Jensen, personal communication, January 24, 2012).

Thurlow Weed, who also visited St. Croix, reported on the medical services offered on the island, indicating there was one physician on each estate. The physicians were paid one dollar a year for their medical services to each slave, and the apothecaries who furnished medicines were paid twenty cents each year for each slave. Weed mentioned an eminent physician on the island, Dr. Stevens (whom Edward Emerson met) who could provide his patients “all that medical science and experience can do for them” (Weed, 1866, p. 373).

One issue that surfaced a few years before Edward’s arrival in St. Croix involved the apothecaries or pharmacies on the island, an important adjunct to medical treatment. In 1819, Peder Eggert Benzon, who approved the pharmaceutical examination in Copenhagen, managed to extend his jurisdiction to St. Croix by obtaining the titles of official inspector for all pharmacies and inspector of all imports of drugs. By 1821, he was recommending the expulsion of all other pharmacists from the island because they were not providing appropriate medications. It appears he was trying to squelch the competition. In December 1826, the Danish government approved a *Privilegium exclusivum*, a royal Danish monopoly. The following year Benson opened his *Pharmacie* in Christiansted, advertising leeches (for blood letting) for sale at the Pharmacy in King’s street No. 50 (Graffenhagen, 1996).

**Edward’s Experience**

Edward’s journal opens with his arrival in the Caribbean. In contrast to other travelers, he did not describe his experience during the voyage. His view of the region includes the islands of St. Bart, Nevis, St. Kitts, “Eustatia” and Saba (Emerson journal, 2 January 1831). These islands are off course for a direct voyage from New York, but Edward’s explanation reminds us that the wind dictated the trajectories of sailing ships. Throughout the pages of his journal, Edward makes constant references to his hope of improved health, through the salubrious environment. Recently arrived, he commented: “…the climate grows kindly & perhaps he [the invalid] gets well by some of the many remedies which nature here holds to every sense” (5 January 1831). After setting himself up, he followed a routine, starting with breakfast, horseback riding or walking for an hour and a half, lounging, reading, some more walking and an hour long bath in the afternoon. During his rides he visited numerous estates and held lengthy conversations with the owners and other visitors. He found “…politeness seems to abound in St. Croix…” (4 March 1831). During those outings he tasted local dishes and many tropical fruits. He mentions soursop as good for “invalids.” He attended several evening events at some of the plantations, as well as on visiting ships. He does not mention being treated by any of the well-known local physicians, and only once does he note taking some medication prescribed by his New York physician (21 February 1831).
Edward was visited by Dr. Stedman once (26 January 1831), but does not mention being treated by him. Dr. Stedman was acquainted with a Dr. Mitchell, whose “early powers he described” (the nature of these powers is not defined, so it is unknown if they were related to healing); a Dr. Wistar-Emmett and McIntosh, without any indication of the nature of the acquaintances. Edward later referred to a Dr. Stevens (half brother of Alexander Hamilton), who traveled to Scotland to study medicine, where he “made his famous experiment on digestion,” and also a “young Dr. Stevens,” a surgeon (20 March 1831).

At one point, Edward noted he was living in “the climate of Paradise” (23 January 1831). Charles wrote to William Emerson, “I have a letter from Edward dated Feb. 5, he speaks of the Eden he is in…” (1 March 1831, Massachusetts Historical Society Ms N-251, item 186). In addition, Edward’s notes and especially his recovery indicate that his sojourn in St. Croix was beneficial to his health. Edward’s journal confirms what contemporary “invalids” wrote about St. Croix. It was a wonderful place to recover one’s health, marked by the friendliness, politeness and hospitality of its people.

Edward and those other visitors to St. Croix during the 1830s documented in their letters and journals the now-forgotten popularity of St. Croix as a health spa supported by the ease of travel from the States, the congeniality of its people and the medical services provided by its physicians.

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**Author Note**

Wilfredo A. Géigel is a trial lawyer by profession, an independent scholar, member and past president of the Society of Virgin Islands Historians and an Adjunct Professor of History at the University of the Virgin Islands, St. Croix Campus. He is the author of three books on legal and historic topics.

Institutional affiliation: University of the Virgin Islands St. Croix Campus, St. Croix, US Virgin Islands, USA

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to: wageigel@gmail.com

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Encountering the Viper: Edward Bliss Emerson and Slavery

Annette B. Ramírez de Arellano
University of Puerto Rico, San Juan, Puerto Rico USA

The journal of Edward Bliss Emerson often mentions topics that piqued his curiosity because they were unusual or puzzling. Few subjects were as foreign to him as slavery. Writing in 1831-32, Emerson provides us a series of aural and visual vignettes rather than a coherent commentary on slavery as a way of life. Focusing on the everyday aspects of the institution instead of the politics and economics behind it, Emerson nevertheless suggests the different lenses through which slavery was viewed by a New England intellectual and others.

Keywords: Slavery, West Indies, St. Croix, Puerto Rico, Edward Bliss Emerson

To tolerate slavery is like [...] sewing up the body politic [...] in a sack with a living viper.

Charles C. Emerson

The journal of Edward Bliss Emerson often mentions topics that piqued his curiosity because they were unusual or puzzling. Few subjects were as foreign to him as slavery. Although Massachusetts was a slave-holding colony until 1783 and Emerson’s maternal great-grandfather was “a slave merchant on a large scale” (Harper, 2003), Edward’s first-hand experience with slavery was limited to Virginia, where he had spent two months when he was 14-years-old. On that occasion, he wrote his mother from Alexandria expressing the opinion that only Blacks seemed to work there, the White population appearing to be mostly idle (Bosco & Myerson, 2006). In a letter to his brother Ralph Waldo, Edward reiterated the prevailing view that it was considered “quite ungenteel for ladies to do the least work, even to put a stick of wood on the fire” and seemed surprised at the fact that so many Whites had slaves (letter of 17 January 1820, Houghton Library b MS Am 1280.226 (190)). Concerning the latter, he wrote the following:

They are a curious as well as an abused people. They call each other brothers & sisters and the children call their elders uncles & aunts. They always have a great aversion to having a negro [sic] for an overseer for they are so much more cruel & hard hearted. […]

Some families here have ten or a dozen Negroes, & hardly anyone however poor has none. There is a very poor woman directly opposite this house who has 2 (letter of 17 January 1820, Houghton Library b MS Am 1280.226 (190)).

Edward, like his siblings, was ideologically opposed to serfdom of any kind (Bosco & Myerson, 2006), but he was also intrigued by how slavery functioned in both St. Croix and

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1 Edward B. Emerson's Caribbean journal and letters can be accessed online at http://bibliotecadigital.uprrp.edu/cdm/ref/collection/librosaros/id/1701. Unless otherwise specified, his letters from that period can be found in that text. Permissions to quote from Edward Emerson's journal and letters have been granted by the Ralph Waldo Emerson Memorial Association and Houghton Library, Harvard University, and the Massachusetts Historical Society and are gratefully acknowledged.
Puerto Rico. He therefore described the enslaved population and its customs, and commented on those aspects of the institution that intrigued or puzzled him.

Shortly after his arrival in St. Croix, where he spent the first three months of his stay in the West Indies, he remarked that “the negroes [sic] […] have appeared happy and well clad” although he also noted that those attached to the house where he was lodging were “excellent servants but ill at peace when by themselves” (Journal, 4 January 1831). The following day Edward went so far as to express satisfaction with the chattel bondage regime and with what he perceived to be the slaves’ acceptance of their fate:

“I am pleased with the appearance of subordination and tranquility that prevails among the Blacks and have as yet felt no shudder at what of domestic government has come under my eye. (Journal, 5 January 1831)

St. Croix was then a colony of Denmark and the Danes had entered the slave trade during the latter part of the 17th century. Then, it seemed a profitable enterprise and “a good idea to send Danish ships with merchandise to Guinea and from there with slaves to the West Indies and from there on home to Denmark with West Indian goods” (Paiewonsky, 1989, p. 6). Over time, the forced relocation of thousands of enslaved Africans, and the cruelty and violence they were subjected to during both the “middle passage” and their resettlement was well-known in their home countries. Not surprisingly, in the words of one eyewitness, those held captive were terrified at what awaited them:

“…they do not believe what the Europeans say, that they are going to a wonderful country. They use any and every opportunity to run away or to kill themselves. They fear death less than slavery in the West Indies…” (Isert, quoted in Paiewonsky, 1989, p. 21)

Toward the end of the 18th century, the Danish rulers were actively lobbied by a keen observer with a powerful pen. Paul Erdmann Isert, a physician of German descent who had studied in Denmark, had experienced the slave trade in both Guinea and the Danish West Indies. Having witnessed several slave rebellions during the crossing and been appalled by the conditions surrounding human trafficking, he wrote a series of letters to prominent persons in Denmark describing what he had seen. Isert was unsparring in his depiction of the slave trade: humans were crammed into ships designed to carry one-third the cargo; slaves were shackled in pairs, the hand of one chained to the foot of another; skippers were barbaric in their treatment of the slaves, whipping them until their flesh came apart; many of the slaves succumbed to illness or mistreatment, or chose suicide over a life of servitude.

Considering slavery to be a historical and moral blunder, Isert asked: “Why did we have to uproot vast numbers of people from their homelands, subject them to agony, torture, humiliation and death; transplant them to alien continents, Caribbean islands, big and small? Why?” (quoted in Paiewonsky, 1989, p. 31). The query was more than rhetorical; returning to Denmark in 1787, Isert enlisted the help of the Minister of the Treasury in the fight against slavery. The following year, his letters were published in Copenhagen, where they elicited much discussion. In 1792 Denmark passed a law prohibiting the traffic of slaves between Africa and the Danish West Indies. The law went into effect in 1803 (Paiewonsky, 1989).

This had limited impact on the society as a whole. There was no way to patrol the seas and ensure compliance with the law, and slaves continued to be smuggled into the Danish islands. By the early 19th century, the planter-slave economy was thriving in St. Croix, the wealth of the former being contingent upon the work of the latter. The result was an opulent lifestyle for the slaveowners, who indulged in the ostentatious display of wealth. Their homes
were “like small palaces in which interiors and exteriors alike showed the fine handiwork of skilled architects and decorators imported from Europe” (Dahlberg, quoted in Paiewonsky, 1989, p. 149).

In 1831 Peter von Scholten was Acting Governor-General of the Danish West Indies (Lewisohn, 1970). A patriarchal ruler, von Scholten was neither a committed advocate of slavery nor an abolitionist. Instead, he was an “ameliorist” who accepted the prevailing system but tried to make it more humane to thwart any attempts at revolt. Because the population of St. Croix comprised some 25,000 slaves and 1,110 Whites (Flinter, 1834/2010), von Scholten had reason to fear that any conflict would ultimately favor the Blacks. Troops were kept ready, Emerson stated, in case of an insurrection [...] in the event of tidings conveyed from neighboring islands where a successful rising would be an example that would run hither like the flash and might excite the quiet Negroes. (Journal, 26 February 1831)

But von Scholten cushioned racial tensions and deflected potential rebellion by instituting measures to make the slaves’ lives more tolerable. He also improved the status of free Blacks, who were growing in number and had previously been denied citizenship, required to carry a “freedom-letter” to show they were not slaves, and been systematically excluded from most jobs (Paiewonsky, 1976).

Sounds and Sights in the Virgin Islands

Emerson noted that “the free Blacks have been admitted to the governor’s levees of late” and suggested that such concessions were designed to secure the goodwill of this particular population as a precaution against insurrection (Journal, 18 March 1831). Months later, writing from Puerto Rico, Edward stated the following:

… the effect of the laws conferring a sort of privilege of equality on the free colored inhabitants of St. Croix and St. Thomas is reported to have led to instances of considerable arrogance and impertinence on the part of some of the said class. (Journal, 29 November 1831)

Interestingly, his reference to equality as a “privilege” rather than an intrinsic birthright suggests that Edward had come to accept the race-based caste system in his new environment. Indeed, rather than commenting on the specific practices of the institution of slavery in the Danish Virgin Islands, Emerson focused primarily on what he saw and heard. He was particularly sensitive to the slaves’ speech and songs, his remarks reflecting the observer’s eyes and ears more than the behavior of the observed. While in St. Croix and St. Thomas, Edward repeatedly described the slaves’ talk as “chatter,” a characterization most likely indicating his inability to understand their words. Whether deliberate or not, Emerson’s description of the Blacks’ speech perpetuated the stereotype of subservience and primitiveness among the slaves (see Simounet, 2014). He thus wrote from St. Croix:

high words have been ringing about the window. (Journal, 4 January 1831)

Dialect of Negro servants a complete English patois with a droll voluble singsong manner. (Journal, 5 January 1831)

Note voluble chattering of Negroes precisely like that of lower orders in
Marseilles or Italy. (Journal, 22 January 1831)

Bought some ban-bush at house of a free Negro woman whose talk was as far from English as any other, except when she strove to be intelligible… (Journal, 2 March 1831)

One of Edward’s few appraisals of slavery as an institution refers to the relationship between master and slave, which he considered detrimental to both. He thus described a conversation in which the topic was brought up by a Mrs. Derby, a fellow American:

Yesterday Mrs. D. was considering how slavery affects the parties --- master & slave --- & we agreed that here [St. Croix] it did not produce a cruel and haughty character in [the] former, but rather a laziness & dependence while it transferred to the latter when industrious & skilful that influence & sway which more or less directly belongs to industry & skill. Nay, more: the slave seems to have gotten an advantage over his owner by the mere involuntary nature of his relations to him, by the slaves’ consciousness of its impropriety, so that if the master be not disposed to use his prerogative & procure the whipping of the slave, the latter will take advantage of this clemency & I remember to have heard a mistress use language of entreaty when that of command was lost on an idle servant. (Journal, 10 March 1831)

When Edward visited sugar estates in St. Croix, he wrote about the “civility of the Negroes” as well as that of the managers (Journal, 12 and 14 January 1831). But he also mentioned details that suggest the slaves’ limited diet and the back-breaking labor to which they were subjected:

their principal food cornmeal, 6 quarts each per week & 6 herrings. (Journal, 12 January 1831)

Negroes eat twice a day. (Journal, 20 January 1831)

Negro women carrying staves 70 lbs on head… (Journal, 14 January 1831)

While stopping in St. Thomas en route to Puerto Rico, Emerson reverted to commenting dismissively on the slaves’ speech, comparing it to that of Italians: “It reminded me of the Italian cities by constant chatter of Negroes, which is as unintelligible as a strange tongue” (Journal, 5 April 1831). Again, the remark is revealing of both Emerson’s naiveté (i.e., an expectation that he would be able to understand the language) and his condescending ethnocentrism: it was he, after all, who was the stranger in those latitudes.

**Slavery in Puerto Rico**

In Puerto Rico, Emerson faced a very different social structure and racial dynamics. By 1831, Africans and their descendants had lived on the island for more than three centuries, and the population reflected the results of racial intermarriage (Díaz Soler, 1994). The production of sugar, which was the mainstay of the Puerto Rican economy, was highly labor-intensive, and slaves were an important source of manpower. The number of slaves rose from 17,000 in 1812 to 28,418 in 1827 and to 34,336 in 1835 (Mintz, 1974). Because this growth
occurred at the same time that the official importation of labor from Africa had slowed down (Mintz), the rise can be attributed to the smuggling of slaves more than to the natural growth of the enslaved population. By the time Edward arrived in Puerto Rico, slaves had become a fungible commodity. Whether purchased or acquired through trade or inheritance, slaves were exchanged, used to pay debts, served as collateral, and supplemented transactions in real estate and commerce (Picó, 2012).

The land devoted to sugarcane increased threefold between 1823 and 1833 and slaves were highly prized as labor in the sugar mills (Díaz Soler, 1994). A landowner’s economic power was measured by the number of slaves in his plantation. But the increased demand for sugar required a growing labor force, and this expanded beyond what could be provided by slaves. Slave labor was therefore supplemented by free laborers. By the early 19th century the number of plantations in Puerto Rico relying solely on slaves was decreasing. Free wage-earners and slaves worked side-by-side, a situation that accelerated the process of acculturation among the imported population and promoted the mixture of races (Díaz Soler, 1994). In 1830 the island’s population numbered approximately 324,000 of which 50 percent were White, 39 percent were free Blacks or persons of mixed race, and 11 percent were slaves (Vázquez Calzada, 1988). (Unlike in St. Croix or Cuba, slaves never accounted for more than 12 percent of the population of Puerto Rico) (Vázquez Calzada).

At the same time, violent change was occurring nearby: Saint-Domingue (now Haiti) had overthrown the French and emancipated its slaves early in the century, and this had put other European powers on notice. The revolt in Saint-Domingue had resulted in the massacre of 2,000 Europeans, the destruction of hundreds of plantations, and the decimation of the sugar output (Mathieson, 1926). Between 1810 and 1826 most of Spain’s possessions in Central and South America had fought for and won their independence, and only Cuba and Puerto Rico remained as colonies of Spain. The combined effect of the pauperization of Saint-Domingue and the dwindling empire enhanced the relative importance of the Spanish West Indies, which were better placed to expand their production and command a greater share of the world’s sugar exports. Spain was intent on taking advantage of this juncture to promote its colonies’ agricultural prosperity, and recognized that the sugar boom required adjusting its existing policies. Like von Scholten, the Spanish crown acknowledged the need to improve the lot of the slaves in Puerto Rico and Cuba if these islands were to avoid the upheavals that had occurred elsewhere (Cubano, ca. 2011).

In Puerto Rico, new laws to regulate and improve the condition of the slaves were introduced by Governor Miguel de la Torre, whose policies were summarized in the glib maxim that “A people who is amused does not conspire” (Figueroa, 1969, p. 89). Like others versed in the art of governance, de la Torre believed that entertainment---dance, drink, and dice---would defuse any discontent among those who sought freedom from the colonial yoke of Spain, as well as those who advocated for the abolition of slavery. His administration therefore sponsored games, masquerades, lotteries, contests, festivals, plays, and concerts which, together with the ceremonies and pageantry of the Catholic Church, kept the population engaged and entertained.

Legislation and other measures enacted during de la Torre’s regime were particularly relevant to the slaves and their owners. One of the new laws required a Registry of Slaves: after 1826, all slaveholders were required to report the number of slaves in their households or plantations. The authorities therefore had a detailed record of births, deaths, and marriages, as well as reports on runaways. More important were laws that imposed a number of responsibilities on all slaveholders. These included an obligation to care for their slaves: feeding and clothing them, housing them, providing them with health care, and rearing their children (Cubano, ca. 2011). The same laws established that owners should temper their
punishments to inflict the least harm possible, and prescribed the work day: slaves were to work 9 hours a day during most of the year, and 13 hours during the *zafra* or harvest, which began in January and ended in June. They were to have Sundays and religious and national holidays off from work; those with greater years of service were entitled to a shorter work week or more days off. The law also included mechanisms to encourage slaves to work towards purchasing their freedom, at the same time that it restricted slaveholders from unilaterally granting freedom to minors and those incapacitated by age or illness (Díaz Soler, 1994). But de la Torre also believed in stern repressive measures, stronger surveillance, and the rewarding of whistleblowers who reported potential slave rebellions. The combination of concessions and punishments had the intended effect: of the 22 slave conspiracies that took place between 1795 and 1848, only 5 took place during de la Torre’s 17-year rule (Picó, 1988).

**Slavery in Puerto Rico through a New Englander’s eyes**

As in St. Croix, Edward’s descriptions of the slave population in Puerto Rico center primarily on what he deems to be the culture of the slaves and the behavior of discrete groups of individuals. Although he mentions the illicit trade and some aspects of the labor carried out by those enslaved (Journal, 29 June 1831), Emerson provides us a series of aural and visual vignettes rather than a coherent commentary on slavery as a way of life.

Living in the city, Edward was primarily in contact with slaves who worked in private homes and businesses. But his frequent trips outside the city walls also exposed him to those engaged in agriculture and other enterprises. When he visited the country home of a Mr. McCormick, he described his host’s slaves as “assembling in front of his house every evening repeating their rosary” (a practice required by law) and also indicated, without further comment, that McCormick spoke of the slaves’ “want of all just sense of morality” (Journal, 19 April 1831).

In San Juan, where most of the slaves were employed in domestic chores (Negrón Portillo & Mayo-Santana, 1992), Emerson focused particularly on the music and dancing of the Blacks:

Saw collection of Negroes assembled on the ramparts for a dance, with the instruments of music peculiar to their nations — two large and long buoy-shaped drums of which the one end rests on the ground while the other is covered with parchment & is beaten with rapid strokes. On the side I observed the word Congo painted; — and I hear that the Congos consider themselves as the most eminent here […] Others of the Negroes had rattles made of calabash and called in English “shake shake,” a name excellently descriptive of the music; there are two other instruments in use among the Blacks, & [in] their dances, they separate themselves into the four or five nations to which they pretend to belong. A boisterous singing & violent jumping joined to the clatter make out the merry ball. (Journal, 5 June 1831)

A few weeks later, on the eve of the feast of St. John the Baptist, the patron saint of the city, Emerson wrote that

The noise of the Negroes with their jingling instruments & songs & laughter aroused me very early long before light this morning. They continued to make pretty good music also by merely clapping the hand in accordance with the drum or congo. (Journal, 23 June 1831)
The following Sunday he noted the vigor of the continuing celebrations, pointedly underlining what he perceived as the repetitive monotony of both the rhythms and the dances:

Walked tonight, saw a band of Negroes dancing to drum & shake shake & congo upon the ramparts, singing a simple tune with I should think not more than three different notes, & perhaps no meaning --- & moving backwards and forwards from within a circle with a step as uniform as the song, & such as it needs no Monsieur to teach; I noticed three or four houses also on the way where similar music & jumping was going on within doors. Labouring as they do perchance they seem indefatigable in their diversions. (Journal, 26 June 1831)

Six months later, Emerson was less tolerant of the Blacks’ music and merriment. On the feast of the Three Kings (Epiphany) he noted, “the clatter of congos & rattles by which the Negroes enliven their dances is very annoying to those who love quiet nights, on the recurrence of these festal seasons” (Journal, 6 January 1832).

The journal-writer also commented, not without a tinge of mockery, on the slaves’ reaction to the distribution of clothes:

After breakfast saw the Negroes receive their clothing of a stuff called bamboo […] The men received theirs with apparent contentment. When the woman [sic] came in, one who was quite tall & with the exception of that single advantage, remarkably ugly, walked directly to a large looking glass before which she stood with signs of gratified curiosity or vanity, beckoning to her companions to join her in the survey of her figure, before she entered the room where their master distributed the clothing. (Journal, 1 November 1831)

But Emerson’s exposure to the enslaved population was not limited to witnessing their celebrations and customs; he also commented on several incidents of tension and punishment. The first is a brief mention of a “Negro coming with sword & pistol & giving disturbance […] Result may be the death of Negro but is uncertain” (Journal, 29 July 1831). The second refers to an altercation in which his employer, Sidney Mason, had to intervene. The incident underscores the writer’s bafflement at a practice that allowed the Blacks to be armed at the same time that the law severely punished certain uses of the weapons:

I saw a violent battle between a Negro on a canoe and a cook of a vessel close by, who taking offence from words went to blows, & availed himself of the utensils of his profession, throwing the same even to the teakettle against his dusky antagonist. Mr. Mason & others succeeded in parting the combatants, before the arrival of some other Negroes who were hastening to aid their countraman, & might have done harm with their short swords. These latter instruments are strangely enough allowed to be put in the hands of the Blacks & are very commonly seen, especially in the country where they seem to be worn as jackknives are by sailors for all sorts of uses. Yet the law makes the Negro lose his hand if he raise it against a White man. (Journal, 29 September 1831)

On Holy Thursday, 1832, Emerson mentioned the physical brutality of the punishments meted out to the slaves:
Today I have seen 3 Negroes with fetters & a huge log on their shoulders attached to them to prevent them from running away & to punish the repeated attempt to do so; --- two others I saw in the stocks, sitting easily but with one foot made fast. (Journal, 19 April 1832)

Emerson also noted that in Puerto Rico there was no physical separation between the races, and that slaves and masters took part in the same religious observances. During a celebration on the eve of the feast of St. Francis, he noticed the array of skin colors among those attending mass, “hundreds of ladies & girls & Negroes kneeling from the altar all the way to the opposite door:”

It was not an unpleasant circumstance that the dark face of an African or the yellow features of a mulatto were seen frequently intermingled with the whitest of the fair, & not the slightest symptom of uneasiness exhibited on account of the proximity. (Journal, 3 October 1831)

Apparently, Emerson did not realize that propinquity did not necessarily imply community; in fact, race-consciousness continued to shape social relations, although in more subtle ways than would be readily apparent to a New Englander. He makes no mention of the many labels for skin color used in Puerto Rico to sift and sort people into different racial categories, and hence into a hierarchical social system based on color.

When Edward addressed the institutional aspects of slavery, it was the master-slave relationship that concerned him. Stopping once more in the Danish West Indies (this time in St. Thomas) en route from the United States to Puerto Rico, he commented on the relationship between slave owners and those they considered chattel. As in his previous conversation with Mrs. Derby in St. Croix, Emerson focused again on the effects of slavery, suggesting that it was the slaves, by virtue of their labor, who had the upper hand in the relationship:

I am struck even more forcibly now than in my former visit to the W. Indies with the very great freedom which the colored people enjoy here, being far greater in fact than that exercised by the majority of the same color in N. England. Perhaps it is the law of nature that he who works, he whose physical power & industry really carry on the operations of the social machine [...] shall by the very gravity of his character possess an influence & hold a station superior to that of the less industrious whom birth & fortune may have made their apparent masters... (Journal, 29 October 1832)

While he admitted that his opinion might be contradicted by instances in which “the whole power is claimed & used by the proprietor & the slave is almost a mute machine in his hands,” he nevertheless concluded that the institution of slavery in the West Indies was distinctly marked by a force of character in the working part of the community which shows itself [...] a license of tongue & gesture that indicate a consciousness of influence & capacity in the slave beyond what is manifested by men of the same color in a free country. (Journal, 29 October 1832)

Of course, his views were conditioned by the fact that he was comparing slaves in the West Indies to Blacks in the United States at a time when the latter, whether enslaved or free, were
victims of severe prejudice, segregation, and a myriad humiliations regardless of their legal status. Given this measuring stick, it is not surprising that Edward considered the situation of Blacks in Puerto Rico and in the Danish islands to be relatively humane.

The Everyday vs. the Institutional

Emerson was not loath to criticize Puerto Rican society. Although his journal or memory book consists primarily of brief jottings on a wide range of topics, he occasionally included longer disquisitions on those aspects of nature with which he was particularly impressed as well as those features of civic and social life to which he objected (see essays by Mayo-Santana & Simounet, 2014). A captious writer, he criticized what he considered the inefficiency of the work force; the lack of intellectual stimulation; the apathy, indolence and frivolity of certain segments of the population; and the perfunctory observation of religious rituals. Nevertheless, there are some subjects which he did not fully address. Just as he is silent concerning Puerto Rico’s colonial situation and what that meant for the island’s people, he is decidedly guarded on the subject of slavery. Indeed, the institution is not a target of his pointed comments and criticism. Why this silence on a topic that affected so many aspects of Puerto Rican life at that time?

We can only speculate, because Emerson offers few clues in his writings; indeed, he maintained an unusual detachment from the subject of slavery, and refrained from editorializing even when pointing out the obvious injustices of the system. One reason is that he did not distinguish between race and labor status. As a result, he tended to equate being Black with being a slave, although, at least in Puerto Rico, the number of free Blacks was rising and they accounted for almost two-fifths of the population at the time of Emerson’s sojourn on the island. Another explanation may be that Emerson’s employer, Sidney Mason, had a financial stake in at least two plantations that depended on slave labor (Baralt, 1992). Edward may therefore have been reluctant to criticize the behavior of someone on whom he depended for his livelihood and companionship. Finally, he may have been muzzled by two contemporaneous witnesses to whom he was close: his brother Charles and George D. Flinter. Each of these wrote unambiguous though contradictory views of slavery as an institution, views that they communicated to Edward and later made public.

When Charles Emerson visited his brother in Puerto Rico in 1831-32, he wrote letters and an essay that left no doubt as to his opinions on slavery. Charles was on the island for 3½ months, during which he spent several weeks at Mason’s largest estate, “riding about morning & evening, through sugar plantations, rivers, ponds, dingles, and bosky dells” (Charles C. Emerson to Mary Moody Emerson, 4 February 1832, in Bosco & Myerson, 2006, p. 165). This extended stay in the country provided him a close exposure to slavery. He therefore expressed opinions on both the institution’s everydayness and its broad policy effects:

The slaves enjoy a good deal, & are humanely treated on this island, as I am told they are generally through the West Indias [sic] --- more so than in the U.S. But I am too lately come from the cheerful abodes of free labourers, to look at them with any satisfaction --- I feel grieved, & at the same time humiliated, as we do when we see the monkey. They do not work nearly so hard as does the Yankee farmer --- but they work without the consciousness of liberty & property, which makes toil honorable and sweet. […] to tolerate slavery is like nothing so much as sewing up the body politic […] in a sack with a living viper. (Charles C. Emerson to Ezra Ripley, 15-17 January 1832, in Bosco & Myerson, 2006, p. 163)
Writing to his brother William, Charles again used the image of the viper and the body politic, stressing the incompatibility of the two and the urgency of addressing “the great question of Slavery” and “healing this great breach of divine & human law.” But Charles also admitted that he was ignorant on the cure for the “deadly evil --- whether it admits of salves & palliatives, & dieting, & gradual remedies --- or must have knife at once, & at all costs & all hazards” (Charles C. Emerson to William Emerson, 5 February 1832, in Bosco & Myerson, 2006, p. 166). It would take three years for him to opt for the surgical approach and declare himself an abolitionist (Charles C. Emerson to William Emerson, 29 April 1835, in Bosco & Myerson, 2006).

Summing up the experience of slavery in Puerto Rico, Charles described the situation as follows:

The condition of the slaves here is, physically considered, very tolerable. Self-interest prevails with the master to treat them well, when justice or mercy would plead in vain. They are in general neither over-worked, nor ill-fed. They have their patch of ground & sell to their masters on fair terms the products of their land, or of their skill & labor [in] holiday hours. Any one may buy himself free for the price his master bought him with --- and the master can demand no more, whatever handicraft he may have taught him. [...] Still, a slave is a slave, and is made to feel it --- If he raise his hand against a White man, it is death by the Law--- He is called to work by the crack of a whip --- And the theory is that if he is not soundly flogged now & then, he will grow unmanageable. (Charles C. Emerson to William Emerson, 5 February 1832, in Bosco & Myerson, 2006, p. 166)

Charles’s views contrasted with those of George D. Flinter, whom Edward befriended in Puerto Rico. Flinter, an Irishman who had served for 21 years as a British military officer in the Caribbean, spent three years (1829-1832) in Puerto Rico, overlapping Edward’s residence on the island. During his stay, Flinter penned two books on Puerto Rico. While conceding that “slavery, in every form and shape, is an evil of great magnitude,” he felt that slaves under the colonial administration of Spain enjoyed “greater comforts than many of the peasantry of Europe” and that the bitterness of slavery was “very much mitigated by the humanity of the Spanish laws” (Flinter, 1834/2010, pp. 233-235). Flinter also stated that the manumission of slaves was more frequent in the Spanish dominions than everywhere else, and described instances of slaves choosing slavery over the possibility of purchasing their freedom. Because he saw the slave owner as humane and caring and the slave as docile and childlike but with “savage manners” in need of correction, he depicted the relationship between the two as that between parent and child:

The humane and praiseworthy custom among the Spaniards, of treating the numerous slaves they employ in domestic service with the same kindness and familiarity as if they were their own children, accounts for the reciprocal attachment that is generally observed between the master and the slave in the Spanish colonies. (p. 237)

Given his vision of slaves in need of guidance, and of masters as paternal and humane, Flinter expressed his approval of the existing Spanish code. This, he felt, “breathes mildness and humanity; …affords protection to the slave; and infuses the balm of hope and consolation into his bosom” (Flinter, 1834/2010, p. 238).
As his account makes clear, Flinter was an apologist for the existing regime, saw the laws and decrees governing slavery as “monuments of humanity and wisdom,” and did not advocate change. Edward visited Flinter on several occasions, heard him read his text, and helped him find a printer for its publication. Nevertheless, Emerson distanced himself from Flinter’s opinions, subtly questioning not only his conclusions but also his motives. Writing to Charles, Edward characterized Flinter as “saccharine” and described his writing as lacking the impartiality that he, Edward, “should wish to see employed in the description of Porto Rico.” He attributed the Irishman’s sugar-coating of the issue to a desire to curry favor with the Spanish crown, then asked, “Who knows how much it is fault & how much it is misfortune & blindness in the favored to praise the hand that holds out to them patronage & support?” (Letter from Edward B. Emerson to Charles C. Emerson, 30 November 1831, emphasis in the original).

These accounts of the practice of slavery in St. Croix and Puerto Rico suggest the different lenses through which the institution, and hence its fate, was viewed. Similar discrepancies and diverging opinions would inform much of the political discussion on the topic over the following decades. Even committed abolitionists differed concerning when, how, and at what cost slavery should end. As a result, the debate over the issue would not be settled in the Danish West Indies until 1848, following a slave rebellion and von Scholten’s declaration of emancipation. In Puerto Rico, slavery was not so much overturned as chipped away or eroded over time. The clash between moral values and economic self-interest led to protracted battles that overlapped in part with the debate over Puerto Rico’s governance. But intermittent slave rebellions and the activities of a small group of committed abolitionists eventually succeeded in calling attention to the evils of slavery and bringing it to an end. It was not until 1873, when slaves accounted for 4.2 percent of the population, that the Spanish legislature finally abolished the practice of slavery on the island. In time, most of the sounds and sights that Edward B. Emerson found foreign and picturesque would lose their association with slavery and become part of a rich West Indian culture. Other aspects of the institution, however, including racial prejudice and a disdain for manual labor, remained embedded in the islands’ social and economic structure and left traces that are felt to this day (Picó, 1988, p. 190).

References


Author Note

The author is a graduate of Mount Holyoke College, Yale University, and the University of Puerto Rico. She has a doctorate in health policy from the Mailman School of Public Health of Columbia University, and has published widely on subjects related to health policy and the history of public health.

Institutional affiliation: University of Puerto Rico Graduate School of Public Health

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to annette@ramirezdearellano.com.

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The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: The Construction of Othering in Edward Bliss Emerson’s Caribbean Journal of 1831-1832

Alma Simounet
University of Puerto Rico, San Juan, Puerto Rico USA

This paper examines the vocabulary, grammar structures and rhetorical devices that appear in Edward Emerson’s journal based on his trip to the Caribbean. The end-in-view is to identify the devices that Emerson utilized, mostly unconsciously, in his depiction and construction of others; in the case of this journal, of the peoples he encountered in the Caribbean. The methodological approach of critical discourse analysis guides this examination. Keywords: Edward Bliss Emerson, West Indies, St. Croix, Puerto Rico, New England, Othering

Introduction

When asked for a definition of language, many will readily say that it is a tool for communication. What they do not explain is how language varies depending on its function or use in a particular context of communication. This essay examines the words used by Edward Bliss Emerson in his 1831-1832 journal of his visit to the Caribbean islands of Saint Croix, St. Thomas, and Puerto Rico. It is an in-depth look at the language that is typically associated with the description of places visited by individuals whose basic aims are to either keep a written memoir of their experiences in the form of a journal or letters, or share the results of their experiences with potential readers such as family, friends or the book-reading public.

Ethnographies or descriptions of cultures are primarily the responsibility of cultural anthropologists. However, throughout history, as is the case of Greek writers Tacitus and Pausanias, the retelling of these stories in the form of unedited personal letters and journals or published accounts has become part of the genre known as historical travel literature (Riggins, 1997).

Emerson’s journal is an excellent example of this literary genre from the 19th century. It is also the personal repository of his experience abroad “in search of health” (Frawley, 2004, p. 113), and as such sheds light on the scholarship on invalidism. This term refers not only to a condition of disability among individuals, but also to the literature on this phenomenon and the study of cultural and social responses to notions of incapacity. Within this area of knowledge, there are many personal accounts of travel reports of the so-called invalids; to name a few, we have Bullar’s 1861 Letters from Abroad, from a Physician in Search of Health, Blake’s 1886 article, Try the Bahamas, and the anonymous publications Summer Tour of an Invalid in 1860 and A Voyage to Australia for Health in 1884 (cited in Frawley, 2004).

In her book on Invalidism and Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain, Frawley states that

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1 Edward B. Emerson's Caribbean journal and letters can be accessed online at http://bibliotecadigital.uprrp.edu/cdm/ref/collection/librosraros/id/1701. Unless otherwise specified, his letters from that period can be found in that text. Permissions to quote from Edward Emerson's journal and letters have been granted by the Ralph Waldo Emerson Memorial Association and Houghton Library, Harvard University, and the Massachusetts Historical Society, and are gratefully acknowledged.
...a market for travel literature by invalids in fact thrived throughout the nineteenth century. The steady flow of such travel accounts throughout the period suggests that their appeal extended beyond fellow sufferers and that these texts satisfied cultural needs different from those of narrative adopting the private confessional stance. Many travel accounts either written by invalids or directed to them simultaneously served a population of armchair travelers in Victorian England. (p. 116)

There is no indication that Emerson wrote his journal with the goal of publication. However, as a personal document, it constitutes relevant documentation for the scholarly study of invalidism and the travel literature associated with it.

Emerson’s journal may thus be viewed from a myriad of perspectives. However, the aim of this study in particular is to present the results of a close reading of Emerson’s words in order to extract from the language used in his writing a clearer view of the descriptions of the experiences he lived. It is thus also an attempt to unveil or uncover the ideas that he utilized unconsciously to make these descriptions, and, through them, his own construction and representation of the people, places and events he observed.

According to recognized scholars in the study of culture such as Bhabha (1994), this aspect of the representation of *others*, of those that belong to cultures different from ours, is the result of an unconscious dimension of thinking. Most of us use it to classify, make interpretations and evaluate other people and the activities in which they engage (Lustig & Koester, 2010). As to the term *others*, it is part of the common terminology used in anthropology, sociology, cultural studies and discourse analysis. It is used to refer to “all people the Self perceives as mildly or radically different” (Riggins, 1997, p. 3). The terms *othering*, *otherness* and *alterity* are also prevalent in the literature and are used to describe the result of this cognitive process.

Anthropology, as a discipline historically constituted to understand others, coined the term “ethnocentrism” to explain our participation in the understanding of those different from us. Anthropologists tell us that we “think, feel, perceive, and perform from a certain perspective that we have acquired in the process of becoming human…” (Grimson, Merenson, & Noel, 2011, p. 9, translated from Spanish by this author). As a result of this, we cannot understand immediately those views that are different from ours unless we engage in a process of deep reflection. Emerson’s descriptions of Caribbean island places, people, and events therefore must be viewed under the rubric of the ethnocentrism that permeates our way of thinking. Ethnocentrism elevates the values of the society to which we belong to the category of universality; thus this social construct becomes the only frame of reference in our observation of others (Todorov, 1991, as cited in Grimson et al.). This is precisely, then, how Emerson’s descriptions are to be seen and understood: within the scope of his New England upbringing and his European-oriented education.

**Methodology**

The theoretical and methodological approach of critical discourse analysis (CDA) (van Dijk, 2009) provides the most appropriate perspective to analyze Emerson’s journal (Riggins, 1997). The qualitative aspect of this method ensures that findings are not merely numbers and statistics, but that the subtleties of the phenomenon undergoing study are clearly seen. This approach employs the qualitative method of analyzing written texts through close readings of them and is based on the belief of anthropologist and linguist Dell Hymes (1962) that language is first and foremost a socially situated cultural form. This posture recognizes and understands that much of the linguistic form cannot be separated from how and why it is
used. In relation to this understanding, Saville-Troike (2003) believes that this view and each of its subsequent developments “…stress the need to look at the larger sociopolitical contexts […]”, claiming that those contexts may determine features of […] use in ways that are not evident from a focus on language alone…” (p. 253).

Critical Discourse Analysis (van Dijk, 2009; Wodak & Meyer, 2009), as a methodological approach, is grounded on the belief that the relation between words and truth is problematic. Any text, written or oral, is viewed as a selection and an interpretation of events. Therefore, the representations that are made of events are characterized by a possibility of different and ambiguous meanings that entail some fact and some fiction (Riggins, 1997). No matter how committed some writers are to the accuracy and truthfulness of the ideas they put into writing, all of us are “unwittingly trapped in a world of biased perceptions and ‘stories,’ all of which both exceed and shortchange ‘reality’” (p. 2).

In 1995, Fairclough, one of the original scholars working with CDA in the 1990s, together with van Dijk and Wodak, referred to discourse as “the language used in representing a given social practice from a particular point of view” (1995, p. 56). This language then does not reflect ‘true’ reality because it is based on a different reality, constructed and shaped according to the personal interests of the writers (Riggins, 1997) and to the socio-cultural values the writers learned in their own process of socialization and enculturation. CDA is also involved in the relationship between language, power, and privilege. This study, however, will focus on Emerson’s construction of reality through his use of language, without necessarily eliminating the dimensions stated above.

Some linguistic structures and discursive strategies, together with other stylistic devices of language use, provide the framework for identifying the language items used in constructing the writer’s own realities. The language components included here are lexical items or words—their selection, use, meanings and emotional charge, pronouns (we vs. they), possessive modifiers (our vs. their) and language structures associated with the passive voice, verb modals (use of modal auxiliaries such as may, must) and the use of adverbials such as certainly, unfortunately, obviously.

Discursive strategies refer to ways in which language is used or put together in order to create an idea that is not necessarily the one intended by its dictionary or denotative meaning. Examples of these include the use of absolute negatives or positives such as nil and superb, stereotypes, figures of speech such as metaphors and similes, repetitions for emphasis, expressions characterized by vagueness and ambiguity, and the reliance on both presupposed and absent information. The former is information that is merely implied. The latter is information that is neither provided nor implied. It is these two types of information that prove to be the most elusive and thus difficult to extract (Fairclough, 1995). As to stylistic devices, they are those aspects of language use that are characteristic of the particular style of the writer. They may also entail using language whose register is associated either with formal or informal language, that is, with the use of simple or more complex words, expressions and sentences.

**Presentation of Findings and Analysis**

The main objective of this project is to identify the linguistic, discursive and stylistic aspects of Emerson’s words, which reflect the writer’s construction of his own reality based on this other context, the new situation in which he found himself in the Caribbean. These aspects are presented and discussed following the three categories proposed in the title to this study: the good, the bad and the ugly, as he described them in each of the three islands visited. The findings presented here are a sample of an ongoing research regarding this fascinating work. Taking Frawley’s (2004) discussion of invalidism in the nineteenth century
and another travel account, by an anonymous invalid (A Winter in the West Indies and Florida, 1839), it is clear that some themes within this category of travel literature are a constant feature: climate, landscape, food, Blacks and Puerto Ricans, together with the dialect, music and personal qualities of the two aforementioned ethnic groups. The recurrence of these themes is reflected in the presentation of the most salient findings.

It is relevant to add at this point that the presentation of findings is based on the notion of binary opposites as the title of this essay reads. Thus the good and the bad are radical opposites which are bonded into a dialectic experience (Gikandi, 2011) that is then extended to the notion of ugliness. This dimension is merely an increase in degree of what is already bad. This study has already identified these stances of apparent polarity in some of the comments that Emerson provides about similar, if not equal, experiences as revealed in the recurrent themes mentioned above: for example, motion vs. inertia, overeating vs. undernourishment, fine vs. miserable weather, blistering sun vs. shining star, rude vs. happy music, feelings of loneliness away from his spiritual surroundings vs. feelings of independence in terms of his religious beliefs, happiness vs. ignorance, to name a few.

“The Good”

In order to understand the positive aspects of his new environs, it is important to bear in mind the reasons for which Emerson came to the West Indies. As mentioned earlier, Frawley (2004) comments on the importance of more temperate and warmer climate, such as in the Caribbean, and in the “search of health,” that characterized the published and unpublished journals of those afflicted with incapacity. According to her, highly embellished descriptions of the scenery, of the beauty of nature, and of the balmy climate and its remedial effects run throughout these works. Emerson’s text is no exception. The examples of positive comments that appear below are relevant to each of the islands he visited.

**St. Croix**

In the examples below, note the use of the adverb *kindly* to personify the climate and the totality of remedial power with which Nature is bestowed to provide remedy; the choice of a heaven-like adjective such as *glorious* to describe the ocean, and the participial verbs in adjectival form *untossed* and *unterrified* to create a posture of ease and security. Finally the climate is crowned with a Biblical reference, that of Paradise itself.

…the climate grows kindly and perhaps [Emerson’s underlining] he gets well by some of the many remedies which nature here holds to every sense. (4 January 1831)

I walked to the shore and looked at again on the broad ocean which is truly a glorious sight to one who views it in security from an isle like this, untossed and unterrified. (6 January 1831)

Well has Edwards called this the climate of Paradise. (23 January 1831)

In the example that follows, the description involves the local food, especially the tropical fruit of which he spoke highly. This is obviously connected to its nutritious and remedial value. Emerson goes to great lengths when writing about the delicious and plentiful variety of fruit, a topic that fascinated him (see Rigau-Pérez, 2014).
[The soursop] is very agreeable if taken in small quantity early in the morning and is said to be recommended to invalids, especially the febrile. (6 January 1831)

Despite some inconveniences concerning his perception of the local population—to be discussed below—Emerson found St. Croix to “abound in politeness” and the Black population to be “tranquil” and “civil.”

**St. Thomas**

Although Emerson was in St. Thomas twice, first in 1831 and then again in 1832, his first visit was very brief, only one day, on board the ship that would bring him to Puerto Rico. Emerson described the scenery as follows:

A fine morning shows this beautiful place to great advantage. Its peculiar situation & threefold division on English, French man & Government hills is [sic] picturesque. (5 April 1831)

His description of this port in 1832 confirms his initial aesthetic pleasure with the views.

**St. Johns (San Juan, Puerto Rico)**

When describing the historical aspects of the city of San Juan, which he referred to as St. Johns, Emerson’s style is one of formality, careful choice of words that project beauty and elegance, of metaphoric language; this represents his best written discourse.

Imagine yourself then a well-fortified city, -with lofty walls encircling its entire extent. Supporting ramparts from which, at due intervals, jut forth round sentry boxes, and huge cannons peep through the embrasure, -so strong by art, that the first glance assures the visitor of security against hostile attempts… (Journal, Appendix 2)

…conceive this city to be bounded on the north, on the east, & on the west by the sea & on the south by an arm of the same which after forming a commodious & graceful port passes on eastward and joins the sea again… (Journal, Appendix 2)

So rich & peaceful is the scenery from the southern side that one is almost tempted to suppose as his eye glances first on the walls and then on the opposite country, that some stout pilgrims tired with the tumult of European traffic & contention, wisely fixed on this spot their home & altar, resolved to defend themselves as in a newfound Paradise & seek nothing but how best to enjoy the garden so happily discovered. (Journal, Appendix 2)

The scenery and climate of Nature’s gift to the island was also praised through the use of embellishment in the choice of nouns, adjectives and verbs, the use of absolute positives (*no better climate*), metaphors and an elegant prose.

I walked on the ramparts & thought the Elysian fields could enjoy no better climate & scarcely a finer prospect than that which lay to the South and
Southwest across the bay. Those evergreen hills now darkened now irradiated as the clouds rise and fall between them & the Spectator, or between them and the King of the day, are a beautiful resting place for the eye, their clothing of bushes and trees is ornamental and attitudes or arrangement quite picturesque. (23 May 1831)

“The Bad”

Two themes that evoked in Emerson the tendency to construct negative images of the Caribbean were those that were foreign to him in the environment in which he was socialized and enculturated: large numbers of Blacks vs. a small population of Whites, as was the case in both St. Croix and St. Thomas and, in the case of Puerto Rico, a society mainly made up of descendants of Spaniards, Blacks and a mixture of both, whose culture was characterized by major differences from that of Emerson’s New England. This notion of difference is harmonious with the concept of ethnocentrism as put forth by anthropologists who place it at the heart of the construction of alterity or otherness. Ethnocentrism is a common human tendency in which the patterns of one’s own culture are held as superior to those of others (Lustig & Koester, 2010), thus creating ideas of rejection of that which is ‘not like us’ or ‘beneath us.’ The comments that fall under this rubric, many of them harsh, reflect these visions.

St. Croix

Emerson commented on slavery, but these were reports on what he heard from the White members of the Crucian community. He did, however, frequently comment on the ways of speaking and language of the Black community. Notice in the examples given below the use of the word “dialect” to demean their linguistic system. This word used to refer to a “broken form or non-standard form of a language.” It is now used in the discipline of linguistics with a neutral meaning to refer to the various systems in which languages manifest themselves; thus American English is a dialect or variety of English and so is Received Pronunciation in England, Singapore English, and South African English, to name a few. Colombian Spanish, Castilian Spanish, Puerto Rican Spanish and Mexican Spanish are also varieties of the language called Spanish. There is no evaluative tone in this classification as there was in the former use of “dialect.” The same is true for the term “patois.” Emerson knew he was not a philologist, but he still ventured forth making negative comments about the ways of speaking of the Blacks. In a famous study on language attitudes, Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner and Fillenbaum (1960) discovered that early in adolescence we construct negative attitudes towards others’ ways of speaking; these are reflections of negative attitudes towards others as people, for it is easier and socially more acceptable to discriminate openly against a people’s language than against the people themselves.

Notice in the second quote the use of the progressive form of the verb “chattering” used as a noun modified by the adjective “voluble” to describe the spoken language of Blacks as a constant exchange of unimportant ideas, thus implying the emptiness of meaning in the communicative act among them. The third example is one of lack of intelligibility, but as it is voluntary, he implicitly suggests it is an indication of obstinacy or defiance. From a linguistic perspective, this example in particular is a comment about a speaker’s use of the local Creole language spoken widely on the island at the time and whose intelligibility to non-Creole speakers of English fluctuated from a speech that could either be close to English or very far away from it.
Dialect of negro servants a complete English patois with a droll voluble singsong manner. (5 January 1831)

Note voluble chattering of negroes precisely like that of lower orders in Marseilles or Italy. (22 January 1831)

Mrs. D. bought some ban-bush at house of a free old negro woman whose talk was as far from English as any other, except when she strove to be intelligible, & this is not uncommonly the case here. (2 March 1831)

St. Thomas

Again, the brevity of the first stay provided little data. Still the island was compared to Italian cities in the constant talk about unimportant things coming from the mouths of Blacks.

It reminded me of the Italian cities by constant chatter of negroes, which is as unintelligible as a strange tongue. (5 April 1831)

St. Johns (San Juan, Puerto Rico)

Either because of the length of Emerson’s extended stay in Puerto Rico, which provided him with the opportunity to get to know the island better or because of the pronounced differences between San Juan, a Spanish city, and the island of St. Croix, Emerson presents bad and ugly comments of San Juan, the place, the people, and the activities. The quotes below speak directly to his very negative view of San Juan. Notice the choice of words to describe what he saw: the use of absolute negatives (no books, image void of beauty), the comments full of sarcasm (third example), the portrayal of society as being ignorant and having no literature, the poking of fun at the military, the description of the music as rude, and the sweeping statements about the lack of interest among the men to strive for perfection in comparison with the men in New England. The citations below epitomize how ethnocentrism, kept at an unconscious level, creates the perfect model for the creation of alterity.

ill odors rushing from the doors & courtyards. (7 April 1832)

no bookstores, but several variety shops, & chocolate & grocery stores. (17 April 1832)

13 servants about the house do the work which a third of the number might as well or better perform. (7 April 1832)

no literature. (8 April 1832)

Troops in white: not exhibiting the discipline of West Point. (8 April 1832)

Song & music rude enough but muy alegre strikes the ear… (13 April 1832)

After breakfast walked, read, visited one of the churches large & vaulted but without the splendor & art of Italy & France. Image void of beauty must derive all value from the association & company. (17 April 1832)
Others of the negroes had rattles made of calabash & called in English ‘shake shake’ a name excellently descriptive of the music…a boisterous singing & violent jumping joined to the clatter… (5 June 1832)

The following is a long commentary whose words reflect Emerson’s strong feelings about the city: that it is an ugly reality in San Juan. This marked emotion is felt through the use of repetitive absolute negatives (no lectures, no sermons, etc.), absent information and grandiose style:

It is very possible that much more intellectual and moral entertainment might be furnished to the thousands of ignorant people to be found here, in both upper & lower classes of society; & some attention to this subject is extremely desirable. It is a pity that no other amusements, than games of hazard or even of skill & bodily dexterity & no other comforts than those of repose & common conversation should be offered to thinking men. No lectures, no sermons, no reading rooms, no public libraries, even the theatre not yet completed…this is an excess of apathy or ignorance, as to the value of the intellectual faculties & the need of cultivation… (26 June 1832)

Again the demeaning of the music produced by the “bands of negroes” and the indirect reference to their lack of intelligence is clearly stated:

Walked tonight, saw a band of negroes dancing to drum & shake shake & congo upon the ramparts, singing a simple tune with I should think not more than three different notes, & perhaps no meaning- & moving backwards & forward from within a circle with a step as uniform as the song, & such as it needs no Monsieur to teach… (26 June 1832)

This is followed by the direct comparison with New England:

Men do not strive here as in N.E. after the perfect man. It is present pastime or gainful industry or chance which they follow as their stars. (3 July 1832)

The lines that follow are a devastating condemnation to any society.

I say not that there is no internal piety or virtuous effort or sacrifice here, but if such fruits do abound, the leaves & the blossoms are so scanty & the produce so disposed of as to make the vineyard very unlike the pictures of a 2d Eden that see form under the instructions of northern divines….Still I fear there must be much crime & impurity—mingled with the ignorance of the people about me. I am told of priests who have been beastly drunkards, & great cockfighters. I see much gambling. I hear of bribery as the great advocate in lawsuits; of duelling [sic] …I hear hardly a book named; I see the people go to mass but they seem to have little respect for their clergy & this…must I think render their religion nearly stationary if not retrograde in respect to its influence in stimulating the mind towards imitation of divine perfections… (7 August 1832)
These are strong negative comments coming from a man who is highly religious and well educated, but who cannot escape the humanity that engages all of us into the creation of a condemning view of a cultural other.

Although Edward Emerson’s Caribbean journal for 1831-1832 constitutes an important document for study under the rubric of travel literature and the literature on invalidism, this essay focused on a close reading of the writer’s words in his descriptions of people, places and events in St. Thomas, St. Croix and Puerto Rico. The objective was to present linguistic evidence from the work itself about how Emerson’s words provided a blueprint to his own construction of others. This representation followed the cognitive processes of his inner unconscious and ethnocentric mind, the product of a particular enculturation and socialization process. This type of mind is also one that easily falls prey to this type of perception and characterization in our encounters with others and is unfortunately present in the majority of us (Lustig & Koester, 2010).

In addition to the objective of this study as presented above, the analysis of the work of E. B. Emerson will provide the reader with a wider perspective of the Caribbean as seen through the eyes of a brilliant individual who had traveled here as a very ill man. It will also open other venues into the analysis of travel literature in an area in the world that in the 19th century in particular was considered an ideal place to find health. However, throughout colonial times, the Caribbean had been viewed as the seat of corruption and evil in terms of language, morality, and health, as historical documentation reveals. These contrasting views serve to underscore the importance of the study of the perspective of binary oppositions in the portrayal of the Caribbean.

References


**Author Note**

Alma Simounet is a Professor of English and Linguistics at the University of Puerto Rico. She is an active member of the Ph.D. Program in the Literature, Language, and Culture of the Anglophone Caribbean. Her areas of research are Bilingualism, Ethnolinguistics, and Discourse Analysis.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to: Alma Simounet; E-mail: asimounet2002@yahoo.com

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Nature Writing, American Exceptionalism, and Philosophical Thoughts in Edward Bliss Emerson’s Caribbean Journal1

Raúl Mayo-Santana
University of Puerto Rico, San Juan, Puerto Rico USA

Through the use of qualitative content analysis (Patton, 2002), this essay examines the philosophical thoughts presented in the journal and family letters of Edward B. Emerson for 1831-1834, written in the Caribbean while he was seeking relief from consumption (tuberculosis). The analysis focused on the themes of nature writing, American Exceptionalism, and the journal as evidence of a liminal life-death event. Edward was actively engaged in the genres of travel and nature writing, where Transcendentalist ideas were not evident. In contrast, important elements of that movement emerged in his philosophical expressions. Edward evinced an acute and creative mind until the end of his life, and his philosophical thoughts can be placed under the rubric of the philosophy of life. Edward’s texts manifest a prejudiced contempt toward the people and culture of Puerto Rico and showed a sense of elitism that reflects American Exceptionalism, but his beliefs of human perfectibility seem to derive from a religious model of absolute moral conceptions. Edward’s liminal intimations of mortality elicited a textual silence on consumption and death. The figure of the tragic hero fits Edward’s life and demise. Keywords: Philosophy, Transcendentalism, Content Analysis, Consumption, Tragic Hero, Edward Bliss Emerson

This essay explores the philosophical underpinnings of the journal of Edward Bliss Emerson for 1831-1832. The letters he wrote to his family during this period complement the analysis which revolves around three themes: nature writing, American Exceptionalism, and philosophical reflections.

Like other North American travelers visiting the Caribbean in the 19th century, Edward Bliss Emerson was entranced by the exuberance of nature. He describes the novel world he encounters while also revealing the ideas and values that color his vision. The heightened importance of the United States (U.S.) interests in the West Indies in this period of increased commerce (Dietz, 1986) and American expansionism tend to reflect on American Exceptionalism. In addition, as an intellectual New Englander with a strong Unitarian heritage and as the brother of Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson, Edward’s religious and philosophical beliefs also permeate the texts. This study will look into whether his ideas antedate the religious and literary discourses of Transcendentalism or if they mainly reflect contemporary ideas. The character of the invalid who travels to warm climates to rest and heal, his life in a fragile state and facing the threat of death, is also evident. Edward is in a liminal situation that fosters philosophical musings.

1 Edward B. Emerson's Caribbean journal and letters can be accessed online at http://bibliotecadigital.uprrp.edu/cdm/ref/collection/librosraros/id/1701. Unless otherwise specified, his letters from that period can be found in that text. Permissions to quote from Edward Emerson's journal and letters have been granted by the Ralph Waldo Emerson Memorial Association and Houghton Library, Harvard University, and the Massachusetts Historical Society, and are gratefully acknowledged.
Nature Writing

The notion of naturalism in American Transcendentalist literature, epitomized by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, informs a philosophical study of the comments and expressions on nature found in Edward's texts. R. W. Emerson's *Nature* (1836/2004) and Thoreau's *Walden* (1854/2004) suggest categories of nature writing for a textual analysis from a period perspective. Margaret Fuller's *Summer on the Lakes*, in 1843 (1844/1992) enriches the analytical framework from another perspective. In addition to Transcendentalists' nature categories (e.g., an original relation with nature, divinity in nature and soul, becoming part of nature, nature's laws), Matos Rodríguez's (1993) criticism of the 1833 "Lecture on Porto Rico" by Charles Chauncy Emerson, the youngest of the five Emerson brothers, provides three additional themes (i.e., centering landscape, Edenic references, and the focus on civilization). Because Transcendentalism was a reformist religious movement, essential notions of nature from both Puritanism (Shuffelton, 2010) and Unitarianism (Grodzins, 2010) orient the theoretical framework used here.

*Nature* by Ralph Waldo Emerson was the first Transcendentalist work to advance the belief that nature serves humankind in many ways, and launched an understanding of the relation between nature and spiritual life (Gura, 2010). In "The American Scholar," R. W. Emerson combined the Socratic precept of, "Know thyself," and the modern precept, "Study nature," for him nature was the 'measure of human attainments' (1837/2004, pp. 52-53). Thoreau's writing about nature was "informed by the impulse to know oneself through the world and the desire to speak of that world as genuinely as possible" (Gura, 2010, p. 412). Gura (2010, p. 409) has summarized Buell's (1995) criteria for literary naturalism, as exemplified in Thoreau's prose, as follows: nature as presence, human interests are not the only legitimate ones, environmental ethical accountability, and a sense of the environment as process. To these criteria, Gura adds the "self-consciousness of the capabilities and limits of language." Gura also notes that Fuller's *Summer on the Lakes* (1844) was one of the first American naturalism texts to highlight the "virtual paralysis at the sheer power of nature" (p. 413).

In the late 1830s, Transcendentalism was primarily a religious movement seeking a liberal reformation of religious practices and theological beliefs within New England Unitarianism (Grodzins, 2010). The Unitarian movement emerged from a division between 'evangelicals' (Puritans) and 'liberal Christians' (Unitarians) in the Puritan-descended congregational churches of Massachusetts during the eighteenth century (Packer, 1995/2007). As one scholar indicates, "Unitarians rejected the Puritan, Calvinistic view of human life as hopelessly corrupted by original sin. They denied that people were born sinful, celebrated the potential greatness of human reason and conscience, and developed a spirituality of self-culture" (Grodzins, 2010, p. 52). In contrast to Unitarianism, Transcendentalism held that divine inspiration is natural and universal, was optimistic about ordinary human nature, rejected religious rituals that claimed scriptural authority, regarded prayer as communion or a partaking of the divine as opposed to praise and supplication, saw scripture as poetry, and promoted expanding the 'boundaries of religious fellowship' to other Christian denominations and beyond, without diminishing the superiority of Christianity (Grodzins, 2010). Grodzins asserts that the most profound legacy of Transcendentalism for Unitarianism and liberal religion was its opening of "new possibilities for how to be religious" (2010, p. 67). Ralph Waldo Emerson mainly regarded Transcendentalism as "a philosophical movement" (Myerson, Petrulionis, & Walls, 2010, p. xxiii). However, Transcendentalism originated principally as a religious movement with strong literary manifestations and some important social reform impact; even though none of its leading figures was a philosopher by profession (according to James Murdock; in Gura, 1950/2007), it seems to have made a notable
contribution to the development of philosophy in the U.S., in particular, the philosophy of life and of religion.

The current analysis seeks to answer a number of questions: Are Edward's perceptions of nature merely incidental travel observations or are they deeper philosophical reflections on nature? Is an environmental consciousness, as illustrated by Thoreau's ethical human accountability to the environment, directing these observations or are they mainly the product of his contemplations of nature? Are his beliefs about nature closer to Unitarian or to Transcendentalist conceptions? How does Transcendentalist naturalism permeate the texts? Do they provide evidence that Edward was an original thinker for his time?

Nature in Edward Bliss Emerson's Journal and Letters: Textual Analysis

Edward's observations on nature can be seen in different ways. Some are travel descriptions of new scenes, including incidental travel observations with aesthetic, social, personal, and sentimental undertones. In some cases, his observations reflect social prejudices and critical attitudes that could be found in other New England travelers. Also, they are observations made by an enlightened traveler with a predominantly intellectual frame of mind. But, more important, they are annotations that reveal an awareness of travel and nature writing, that of a naturalist and a walker reminiscent of his New England relatives and friends.

New landscapes usually stimulate the poetic sense of many travelers. Edward’s first impressions of the West Indies, from the ship’s deck, compare the scenery to his homeland:

The air like that of a June evening or May morning in New England and the sky as usually of late such as Italians might admire. And such as poets try to paint, i.e. needing naught, full prodigal of beautiful clouds and colors and combinations, and every moment altering its complexion (darkening or kindling some group or region, new shade or light). (St. Croix, Jan. 3, 1831)

Edward’s illustrated or informed pretensions are also evident from the beginning in his writings: "St. Croix appeared like a cluster of a dozen or two of hills, peaked enough and black enough to be believed old volcanoes, if that were the case (de quo nescio) but not lofty" (St. Croix, Jan. 3, 1831). A keen observer usually captures more than what the uninstructed eye could perceive: "at the distance of 5 miles the aspect of fertility and cultivation is not to be mistaken. Here and there a windmill is revealing the industry of some early risers for it is just sunrise. I like to see their open arms; they always look like acquaintance" (St. Croix, Jan. 4, 1831).

In an 1833 description of San Juan, Edward makes clear that his method of travel writing emulates Thoreau (1861/2010) as a naturalist and a walker: "Without leisure to investigate and still less to invent, I shall put down what occurs to me as anyway remarkable, following no rule but the order of my thought, and writing my letter as I would take a walk" (Puerto Rico, 1832). Edward's brother Charles writes to him the following: "I have not stopped for brake, not stayed for stone, in writing this letter... but please rouse my sluggish faculties... by the tales and speculations of a traveler" (Letter CCE, Cambridge, to EBE, St.C., Feb. 1, 1831, MH bMS Am 1280.226 {5}). Thus, both brothers employ the genre of travel writing.
writing through two different means: the journal, a more intimate and informal voice, and the letter, an interactive and more complete expression. At the end of his 1833 narration, Edward reiterates his writing style as a walker while projecting to the reader the stress walking represents for him: "But let us stop in sight of Fort San Cristobal, lest I fatigue you so much that you will never take another walk."

In addition to portraying the views and paths seen by the walker, the texts reveal the intellectual frame of reference of his stories. His affinities with history and tradition are embedded in his comments about the architecture of the colonial era. Thus, in the 1833 "Account of St. Johns," Edward states: “this like many other edifices finds its best title to further toleration in the reverence felt for antiquity." Similarly, his description of El Morro Castle and talk of a tree imbued with historical lore stirs his imagination:

...tradition dignifies a... tree, under which it is said that the first Spanish settlers held their little council... The uncertainty of such a hearsay does not prevent me from investing the supposed council tree with an imaginary gravity. (Account of St. Johns, ca. 1833)

The reference to an “imaginary gravity” is also found in Margaret Fuller's *Summer on the Lakes* (1844/1992). This genealogical and archetypal reference to trees recalls Thoreau’s style and allusion to the sacred oak of the Druids, as well as the honor conferred on trees: "instead of calling on some scholar, I paid many a visit to particular trees" (*Walden*, 1854/2004, p. 195).

Another tree that attracts Edward's attention is a perennial plant that resembles the form of a weeping woman. Personification of nature is a common trope in travel literature: "One tree much like a weeping woman stood on the brow of a precipice and drew our eyes and mock-sympathy from whatever point we occupied" (P.R., April 7, 1831). The traveler who seeks healing and leaves behind family and friends is hereby suggested: the weeping woman could be the image of the mother left behind; the precipice, the abyss of consumption and exile. Edward also pays a visit to a magnificent tree, the *ceiba*, a symbol of strength and survival: "I walked early out of town... for the sake of visiting a famous silk cotton tree, & of all the trees which I have seen I think it is the most remarkable..." (St.Th., Oct. 30, 1832).

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote in *Nature* (1836/2004), "A nobler want of man is served by nature, the love of beauty" (p. 16). Exultations of beauty also appear in Edward's traveler’s lens: "These hills show rather more round than when first seen. The brushwood is now and then interrupted by patches of smooth green. *Che belleza* 5 to those who come from green seas" (St.C., Jan. 3, 1831). "Nature always wears the colors of spirit," is a famous phrase of Ralph Waldo Emerson (*Nature*, 1836/2004, p. 13). Colors are always evoked in travel descriptions, and Edward’s work is no exception. Exultations of beauty (e.g., Fuller, 1844/1992) were also considered part of nature's divinity by Transcendentalists.

Walking in Puerto Rico with an esteemed New England friend, Winthrop Cunningham, Edward is stirred by feelings of both beauty and unawareness: "Walked with Mr. Cunningham who said he had oft protected poor Bulkeley in his terrors and school-boy perils.—We saw a brilliant star close to the moon; both of us too ignorant to say what was the name of the beautiful orb..." (P.R., July 12, 1831). The allusion to his intellectually

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5 Italian – what beauty!
challenged brother (see Bosco & Myerson, 2006, p. 360, Note 7), Robert Bulkeley Emerson, not only recalls his brother's childhood fears, but also helps to explain Edward's affection towards Cunningham.

The wonder provoked in the newcomer by extreme weather is contrasted with the indifferent reactions of the locals: "I never witnessed thunder more instantaneous and terrific... The want of solemnity, on the descent of the lightning, in those around me appeared unaffected and I suppose comes from habit and education" (P.R., Aug. 22, 1831). Edward's reactions to these booming thunderclaps evoke Fuller's "virtual paralysis at the sheer power of nature" (Gura, 2010), but Edward's resultant emotions tend to be more sociological than Fuller's philosophical "promise of peace"—a rainbow after the storm (Fuller, 1844/1992, p. 220).

Early in his journey, Edward faces the death of other countrymen who had come to the tropics to heal. Despite confronting their graves, he does not lose faith because he seems to be uplifted by nature:

Chance led me directly into the graveyard where some victims to consumption were laid who had come hither from New York... Afterward I passed by a garden wall over which was seen the cabbage tree so eminent for beauty... I walked to the shore and looked out again on the broad ocean which is truly a glorious sight to one who views it in security from an island like this, untossed and unterrified. (St.C., Jan. 6, 1831)

The sounds of sea waves, "loud enough to impress the mind with the sense of their power, almost equal to that felt when we float at their mercy & in their lap," imparts an emotion of uncertainty concerning the possibilities of returning to his New England home: "And now it crosses my mind that this sound admonishes me of the uncertainty which rests on the prospect of my reunion with my distant friends." The possibility of a successful return voyage, leads him to ask, "how shall I chain the winds or calm the sea at the time of my homeward passage?" Here prayer seems to be the answer: "I must look humbly to heaven" (P.R., Sept. 3, 1831).

For an invalid suffering from consumption, the tropics could be an Eden: "went to West End returning in a beautiful evening under a vertical moon. Well has [the author Bryan] Edwards called this the climate of Paradise" (St.C., Jan. 23, 1831). Edward sees the weather as an important factor in the healing process: "Rode out horseback, country quite dry and air pure although rain fell in the night. This island is to me very agreeable on this account of the quickness of recovery from damp and shower, to a soft and clear weather" (St.C., March 4, 1831). The atmosphere, and particularly the air, seems a distinctive attribute worthy of detailed descriptions for the invalid. Thus, Edward's journal is full of different and vivid images of the tropical air. The enchanted air evokes memories of Aunt Mary: "The air is such as to leave nothing to be desired. What a treasure this serenity, this purity of atmosphere - the old woman that Aunt M. tells of w'd. say 'this blessed air,' with justifiable rapture, here" (P.R., Aug. 15, 1831). Aunt Mary reminds Edward of a philosophical ecstatic state.

Hurricanes are a forced reference for everybody in the tropics, especially foreigners. The equinox having passed, "I suppose men take courage about the weather & don't fear hurricanes so much" (P.R., Sept. 26, 1831). The execution of a pirate also draws attention: "The moonlight evening was occasionally disturbed by squalls of wind & rain... Almeyda a pirate who has been 3 years imprisoned here was shot today" (P.R., Feb. 14, 1832). Both the fearful event of a hurricane, as well as epic visions of executed pirates, serve as counterpoints to Edward's tropical Edenic references.

Philosophical and psychological notions are interwoven in Edward's perceptions: "In
my walk to the house I was glad to see that nature does not disappoint so sadly as art, and that the cocoa and the cabbage tree... are as beautiful to the eye as the description and pictures are exciting to the imagination..." (St.C., Jan. 4, 1831). The reference to the thwarting promises of art in contrast to nature’s wonders has to be considered the most profound of all Edward's writing on nature, and foretells Ralph Waldo's and Thoreau's most famous insights on the same topic.

Edward’s style of nature writing is closer to Thoreau and Fuller than to his brother Waldo. His observations and descriptions of nature seem removed from his Unitarian heritage and beliefs even when other parts of the texts confirm that he held Unitarian and liberal theological notions. In terms of nature writing, the examined texts show no evidence of a conception of nature based on divinity or universal natural laws, nor on nature as a presence which links history to ethical considerations. Edward’s concerns about nature are more the product of his contemplations and imagination rather than of an environmental consciousness. Thus, Transcendentalist conceptions of nature seem to play no major role in Edward's writing. In contrast, some important philological, literary, sociological and philosophical reflections evidence his acute mind and academic background.

The following is the last scenic description found in the journal, and captures Edward’s depiction of the port of St. Thomas while returning to Puerto Rico from his short and last visit home:

Came to anchor in the offing or entrance of St. Thomas harbor where we were directed to remain till the Board of Health should determine the length of our quarantine. The beauty of the port often compared with that of Naples - the grand hills which form the cup that contains this little harbor & the tripartite settlement of the city itself which covers with its painted roofs & balconied houses three small eminences which swell out from the northern range as if for the purpose to which they have been turned, - offered a scene so pleasant as to take away the tediousness of involuntary delay. (St.Th., Oct. 26, 1832)

The mention of the quarantine, evocative of psychological notions of separation and segregation, suggests an image of forced exile for the invalid. The quarantine is highly symbolic of his tragic destiny. The narrative also reflects the progressive serenity of a person that 'lingers content to exist' (Letter EBE, St.C., to MME, B., March 11, 1831) as the end of his tragic fate approaches. It points out to the image of the journey of the tragic hero that solemnly approaches an abysmal liminal event: the final degradation by consumption.

American Exceptionalism

Another major theme is Edward's notion of "the perfect man." In his journal he writes, "Men do not strive here as in New England after the perfect man. It is present pastime or gainful industry or chance which they follow as their stars" (P.R., July 3, 1831). Clearly, his phrase pits a superior New England spiritual aspiration against a tropical indolence. Because it is expressed in the journal of a New England intellectual that antedates American territorial expansion in the Caribbean, this moral notion of human perfectibility could be an exemplar of American Exceptionalism, a belief that eventually impinged upon Transcendentalism (Gura, 1950/2007, p. xv). American Exceptionalism has been defined as follows: "America and Americans are special, exceptional, because they are charged with saving the world from itself and, at the same time, America and Americans must sustain a high level of spiritual, political and moral commitment to this exceptional destiny" (Madsen, 1998, p. 2). This notion of U.S. exceptionalism has been also associated to the ideology of Manifest Destiny.
Transcendentalism's emergence coincided with the rise of the ideology of U.S. Manifest Destiny as a 'historically sanctioned right to continental expansionism.' This continental ideology later developed into a special mission of universal civilization and salvation (Buell, 2010). Gura (1950/2007) has advanced the thesis that Transcendentalists "awakened to the possibility of a fully egalitarian brotherhood," but then, "under the pressure of insular politics" lost their battle, thus explaining "how a movement whose roots were catholic and universal eventuated in a discourse that promoted an American Exceptionalism based on self-interest" (p. xv). Madsen (1998) sustains an eager complicity between Transcendentalism and American Exceptionalism. She argues that it is in “The American Scholar” address that R. W. Emerson (1837/2004) advances the idea that "American nature must become the model for an ideal American society," which Madsen portrays subsequently as the expansionism "connection between 'Americanness' and the American landscape" (p. 75). However, that Emerson is proclaiming in this address, first, the need of American intellectuals for independence from "foreign harvests," and thus to "fill the postponed expectation of the world," and that nature, in the spirit of the scholar, "is the first in importance of the influences upon the mind," together with the knowledge of the mind of the past and the notion that the scholar is also a being of action, and his final statement that "a nation of men will for the first time exist," could hardly be seen as a cry for American expansionism nor, necessarily, a conceptual model construction of a nation. Nonetheless, in general, Emerson's conceptualization of nature is not only part of his idealist philosophy, but is deeply related to the universal idea of the “divine in man.” How Transcendentalist notions of universal human divinity become entangled with nationalistic tones of divine destiny and human perfectibility, core elements of exceptionalism, seem to be an essential connection for further consideration.

Puritans, Unitarians, and Transcendentalists believed in, respectively: the need to develop "a pure and uncorrupted church" (Madsen, 1998, p. 3); self-culture and a constant striving towards perfection (Packer, 1995/2007); and the removal of obstructions to spiritual development (Grodzins, 2010). The overlapping belief systems had political implications. Nineteenth-century intellectuals, like the Transcendentalists, anticipated the perfection of democratic institutions. The conception of a divine destiny and striving for perfection, both as a nation and as individuals, was contradicted by the 'peculiar institution' of slavery; therefore, this obstruction to spiritual development had to be eradicated. Edward's notion of the perfect man seems to be deeply engrained in his Puritan and Unitarian heritage, with some hints of Transcendentalism and American Exceptionalism.

Textual Analysis

In order to properly evaluate the issue of American Exceptionalism as possibly latent in the notion of the perfect man, it is important to trace Edward’s different perceptions and evaluations of the people that he encountered and their customs and characters.

The construction of the tropics as a geographical Paradise discovered by Columbus for the enjoyment of Europeans, so common in Caribbean travelers’ accounts, is also found in Edward’s journal. But Emerson is more critical when he ascribes to "ordinary motives & common adventurers, —under the favor of the watchful government of Spain," the resolution of Spanish colonizers "to defend themselves as in a newfound Paradise" (Account of St. Johns, ca. 1833).

Edward judges Puerto Rican society and its people with disdain. Even though his observations of the Catholic Sabbath can be considered liberal in the theological sense, this is
the first time in his journal where a negative evaluation of the Puerto Rican people and society is expressed:

It is very possible that much more intellectual and moral entertainment might be furnished to the thousands of ignorant people to be found here, in both upper & lower classes of society; & some attention to this subject is extremely desirable... No lectures, no sermons (at this season) no reading rooms, no public libraries, even the theatre not yet completed, nor when completed likely to be well supplied with entertainment,- this is an excess of apathy or ignorance, as to the value of the intellectual faculties & the need of cultivation,- & I am willing to see it remedied sooner the better. (P.R., June 26, 1831)

The desire for remediation can hardly offset his contempt; rather, one might call it ironic.

On October 30, 1831, in a letter to his step-grandfather Ezra, Edward describes Puerto Rico as follows: "this island like a docile child follows the mother country, & rests in the bosom of the Catholic Church," not acknowledging the oppressive character of the Spanish rule (Bosco & Myerson, 2006, p. 27). Only in a few instances does he casually bring out some of the repressive measures enacted by the government. For example, he mentions that a petition to the government "cannot go up from more than 3, under pain of being considered mutinous" (P.R., Aug. 21, 1831).

Edward’s negative opinion on the lack of instruction, patriotism and virtue that he found on the island did not disappear with longer acquaintance, as indicated in a letter in Spanish to his brother William almost a year later (Letter EBE, n.p., to WE, N.Y., July 29, 1832). They are also expressed in a letter to Ralph Waldo in 1833, with some regret over his brother’s decision to go to Europe instead of visiting him in Puerto Rico:

I lie not when I say I'm glad that you did not come here... What is the puppet show of a few thousand ignorant & sensual men... what is this daubed & miniature caricature of life, to the mighty spectacle you now look on! (Letter EBE, P.R., to RWE, London, Aug. 16, 1833)

Edward attributed childlike traits to the Puerto Rican people and, in spite of his knowledge of their history, considered their character as frozen in time, unchangeable.

These negative evaluations are accentuated when they are contrasted with New England life: "Boston still the land of steady habits, the city of the sensible, the intelligent" (P.R., Aug. 18, 1831); "you must not expect no echo from P.R. to such intelligence" (Letter EBE, P.R., to CCE, n.p., Oct. 29, 1833, on Commencement day at Harvard); and "here, where the name of Deity & the name of virtue come so seldom to the ear, with the tone & the doctrines that usually accompany them in New England. I say not that there is no internal piety or virtuous effort or sacrifice here, but if such fruits do abound,- the leaves & the blossoms are so scanty & the produce so disposed of as to make the vineyard very unlike the pictures of a 2d Eden that we form under the instructions of northern divines" (P.R., Aug. 7, 1831). It is while comparing life at home with life in Puerto Rico that Edward asserts his notion of the perfect man.

Edward refers proudly to the United States as a military nation, praising its discipline and power. At diverse moments throughout the journal, he shows interest and admiration for military parades and military vessels. He writes: "Troops in white: not exhibg. the discipline of West Point" (P.R., April 8, 1831). In a letter to his brother William, in Spanish, he mentions the visit of a warship to Puerto Rico and asserts that such visits evoke respect
because they show that the United States has a strong armada and thus is a powerful country (Letter EBE, P.R., to WE, N.Y., March 7-12, 1832). And his vivid annotations on the Fourth of July are to be expected coming from an exiled New Englander with apprehensions of being "left and cast away" in the Caribbean for reasons of health and distance (P.R., July 14, 1831).

There can be no confusion regarding the prejudice and contemptuous attitude and sense of arrogance reflected in the journal and letters. In summary, the charges are: the promotion of indolence by the tropical climate; the lack of good work in the West Indies; the excess apathy or ignorance, depicting the island as a docile child; the personal and social character of the people tied to their dependence on gambling and diversions; the puppet show of a few thousand ignorant and sensual men; the daubed and miniature caricature of life; the childlike character in the outward and intellectual collective features; and the contrast between Boston, the land of steady habits, the city of the sensible and of the intelligent and the ignorance widely prevalent in Puerto Rico. Even though some of his observations are based on the harsh realities tied to life in a backward colony in the nineteenth-century Caribbean, Edward does not attribute these behaviors to the inherent social structure of domination and colonialism but rather to the character and manners of the people and their culture.

The majority of Edward's expressions of prejudice and contempt may be attributed to intellectual and moral arrogance, particularly coming from an educated New England man. For example, Bosco and Myerson (2006) say about Edward's letters from Alexandria and Worcester, where he "sought refuge for his health," that "they each exhibit Edward's ability to create and sustain an engaging epistolary narrative based on his surprise that not all communities in America impose New England habits on their citizens, even those that are less than a day's journey from Boston, the New Englander's center of the universe" (p. 54). Thus, Edward's expressions include ideological features common to, but not identical with, the ideologies of American Exceptionalism (e.g., the development of personal and social perfection and a high level of moral and spiritual commitment to this aspiration) and Manifest Destiny (e.g., the perfection of democratic institutions). García (2009) emphatically affirms, based on the evidence of one letter written by Edward to his step-grandfather and one to his brother Ralph, that Edward's letters "deployed," "anticipated" and, even, "promoted" the colonial representations that later "justified" U.S. imperialist expansionism in the Caribbean. Similar to her analysis, this study sustains the disdain expressed toward the people and some anticipation of discourse. But García's essay came short on evidence on the promotional and justification claims.

Edward's notion of human perfectibility, present both in Unitarianism and Transcendentalism, has an inherent potential for flowing into these types of political constructions. Thus, this study sustains some anticipation of the discourse of those ideologies. It could also be said that these texts reflect a sense of superiority and elitism, as well as a tendency towards harsh social and cultural criticism that was perhaps not uncommon to the New England intellectual elite. For example, in his exposition on self-reliance, from the perspective of a non-conformist person, Ralph Waldo affirms the following: "when the ignorant and the poor are aroused, when the unintelligent brute force that lies at the bottom of society is made to growl and mow, it needs the habit of magnanimity and religion to treat it godlike as a trifle of no concernment" ("Self-Reliance," 1841/2004, p. 119). For the invalid travelers Edward and Charles (e.g., see Charles Chauncy Emerson's "Lecture on Porto Rico" of 1833; and Matos Rodríguez, 1993), the tropical trifles were inferior, scurrilous, and without value.
The elucidation of Edward's philosophical conceptions as the last major theme considered in this essay revolves around his intellectual reflections and his liminal intimations of mortality which gave rise to several kinds of silences.

Unitarian liberal beliefs permeated both Edward's family environment as well as the intellectual climate at Harvard, where he studied in the early 1820s. All the Emerson brothers, with the exception of Robert Bulkeley, studied at Harvard at different but overlapping moments (Bosco & Myerson, 2006). An examination of the curriculum and the philosophical ideas that prevailed at Harvard College between 1817 and 1837 indicates that, "nowhere... is there to be found any trace of the German philosophy identified with Kant," and "in metaphysics two divergent streams are found: English empiricism systematized by Locke, and the natural realism or 'common sense' Scottish philosophy, originating with Thomas Reid" (Todd, 1943, p. 67). Unitarians, who initially held ideas not much in dispute with Locke's acceptance of biblical revelation and that share "an empiricism hostile to violations of natural laws," faced several dangers to their early beliefs: Humean skepticism (e.g., Hume's arguments against miracles), science (e.g., geology), and biblical or sacred criticism (e.g., attack on the factuality of biblical narratives) (Packer, 1995/2007, chap. 1). Toward the end of the 1820s, various "cultural mediators" such as Madame de Staël and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (both mentioned by Edward in the texts) made the young Bostonians aware of significant changes in Continental philosophy (Packer, 1995/2007, chap. 2). Coleridge's influence with the Transcendentalists waned when it was found, through the critical observations of Harvard professor Frederick H. Hedge (highly esteemed by the Emerson brothers), that in his famous distinction between reason and understanding, his usage of the terms was un-Kantian (Gura, 1950/2007, chap. 2)—see further discussion below.

It seems that Kant's transcendental philosophy influenced the New England Transcendentalists, mainly through British literary transcendentalism (in particular, through the interpretations of Coleridge and Thomas Carlyle); however, it also seems to be true that it had more in common with mainstream Unitarian thinkers and "common sense" philosophers than with German thinkers (Grodzins, 2010).

A confirmatory hint that Edward was thinking actively of philosophical issues of concern to both New England Unitarians and Transcendentalists is highlighted by Waldo's biographer, Robert Richardson: "There were still flashes of the old Edward, as when in a letter to Waldo he objected to the Coleridgean terminology of reason and understanding" (Richardson, 1995, p. 183; see also EBE’s letter, P.R., to RWE, B., July 7, 1834).

In contradistinction to the abundance of literary criticism, there is one idea treated and elaborated on his texts that reveals Edward's philosophy of life: fraternal love or brotherhood. Very early in his journey (P.R., March 21, 1831) he writes that he "read a little of Cicero" — who wrote a famous treatise on friendship, *De Amicitia*—and in a letter to Waldo in 1833 (EBE, P.R., to RWE, B., Jan. 20, 1833), he even uses the Latin terms for 'friendship' and 'friend.' After reading some lines in Spanish by the English poet, Alexander Pope, ("Pope's *Abelard & Eloisa"*), Edward indicates they "describe writing as the 'gift of heaven', & the 'invention of lovers' & it occurred to me the while that I could assent to the proposition amended by putting 'brothers' for 'lovers'" (P.R., July 14, 1831). Writing in his journal while Charles was in Puerto Rico, Edward expands on the meaning of a brother: "A mother is a benefactress, a nurse, a guardian, as well as a friend; but the brother is the friend without the other claims upon love & respect" (P.R., Dec. 23, 1831). And finally, in his letter to Waldo, (Jan. 20, 1833) he thoughtfully refers to fraternal sympathy and asks for the revival of brotherly love. Indeed, the sentiments of love and esteem for his brothers are expressed in an intellectual manner, but in a way that provides eloquent insights.
Another example of Edward's philosophy of life is found in the archetype of the old man. In the journal, during his stays in St. Croix (at the initial stages of his journey) and in St. Thomas (while returning to Puerto Rico from Boston), he writes two stories about old men whom he respects and admires.

The first story is about a knowledgeable solitary old man, born in St. Kitts, who quoted two English poets, Edward Young (1681-1765) and Alexander Pope (1688-1744), demonstrating "grammar acuteness" in Greek:

He is 'catholic' & talked about the Trinity, but not like a bigot... His critical manner of noticing 'εν [oneness, unity], & I am he. His longevity he attributes to natural strength of constitution... He does not "trouble himself much about the world so long as it does not trouble him." He did not... evince a lively concern in affairs. He has written for some books to be "put up in boxes so tight that none but such book-worms as himself can get them" which he said with apparent enjoyment of his own pleasantery... (St.C., April 21, 1831)

The second story concerns an old beggar, African born, de facto emancipated by the authorities because of his misbehavior:

An old beggar... quite an original in character... he has long followed his present business as a mendicant, evading all other industry in despite of the claims of his owner. His reputed insanity is his shield & buckler & his generally inoffensive character makes it the part of humanity to let him wander at his own will... He denies that he is a slave & asserts his right to whatever land he selects for his subterranean abode; so that he is half philosopher with all his infirmity. (St.C., Oct. 31, 1832)

It seems that the educated wisdom and longevity of one and the mental infirmity of the other touched Edward's literary persona because of his own ill health and his past mental illness.

Philosophical dialogues, however, come alive mostly through his interlocution, by letter or personally, with Charles and Waldo. There are two figures that appear spontaneously in Edward's notes: Madame de Staël, on the distinction between morality and self-interest (P.R., Jan. 29, 1832) and Emmanuel Swedenborg, on a talk on Swedenborgianism with Dr. William E. Channing —New England Unitarian liberal preacher, supporter of Transcendentalist ideas and social actions, who was in St. Croix for his health (St.C., Feb. 17, 1831 & Letter EBE, St.C., to WE, N.Y., Feb. 19-22, 1831). Marcus Tullius Cicero is the only known philosopher that he mentions in an independent manner in the journal. Baruch Spinoza, Swedenborg and Coleridge are mentioned once in the dialogues with his brothers; the first two with Charles. However, the most conspicuous scholarly commentary, on Coleridge, is found in a letter to Waldo.

The philosophical arguments advanced by Edward on the Coleridgean distinction merit a longer quotation:

Nevertheless next year when I come to see you... and if my own steps be guided into a less pleasant path I may at least come a welcome pilgrim visitor from time to time,—and repose & repent & learn & unlearn as need may be, in your philosophic & religious shades.

And now as to the transcendental lecture you gave me about Reason & Understanding, I take—as the phrase is—but I protest against either Coleridge
or the Germans claiming the merit of the discovery of this all important distinction which is, as you say, like all other truth very practical... I don’t deny that Coleridge has (in some few pages of that volume which you lent me) put in forcible light the distinction referred to & that makes me respect him; but again I wholly disapprove the nomenclature so to call it of his system... I even would prefer the old fashioned title by which after all we best attain his “Reason” and by which the theologians have ever termed it... Soul...It is only confounding and not enlightening people to tell them that they ‘reason’ with their ‘understanding’... Newton never would have insisted on men’s talking astronomically about the common apparent motions of the heavenly bodies. Probably you care as little about the terms to which I have alluded, provided the great doctrine can be well evolved without them & it seems to me they impede, not help. (Letter EBE, P.R., to RWE, B., July 7, 1834)

Coleridge makes a strong distinction between the spiritual and the natural spheres, and asserts that the faculties by which each of them are perceived are also different: reason is the supersensuous, intuitive power, source of morality and of the highest intellection, and the understanding is the humbler servant who mediates sensation (Packer, 1995/2007). Kant (Critique of Pure Reason, 1781 & 1787/1997, A15-16/B29-30) distinguishes between spheres of human knowledge: objects are given to us through sensibility and then thought by the understanding. Sensitivity is receptive but contains a priori principles (the intuitions of space and time). The intuitions of sensibility and the concepts of the understanding constitute coordinated manifolds of the conditions of experience. According to Caygill (1995), in the Critique, where judgment comes to be distinguished too, understanding is seen as working through rules while reason secures those rules under principles (pp. 346-350). Thus, Coleridge's distinction seems un-Kantian (Packer, 1995/2007). But Edward's objection to it is based upon other arguments.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, in Nature, distinguishes reason and understanding as follows. With respect to reason, he is in more proximity to Edward's notion of reason as soul: "man is conscious of a universal soul, in the sense of the flux of all things." This universal soul Waldo called reason, intellectually considered, but spirit, in relation to nature (Nature, 1836/2004). However, concerning the understanding, Waldo's concept is more in agreement with Coleridge's usage as the faculty which mediates sensation: "every property of matter is a school for the understanding" (Nature, p. 27). Even though for both brothers reason, as soul, illuminates and transcends experience, Edward’s main argument against the Coleridgean distinction rests on the confusion it creates when telling people that 'they reason with their understanding.' In this regard, he seems to be defending common sensism and the considered views of the ordinary person. Thus, he rejects the need and usefulness of the conceptual differentiation of the faculties based, first, on theological considerations, and second, on a common life argument. Edward's notion of reason is similar to the pre-Kantian philosophical tradition that considers reason in a broader sense as the faculty of the soul which reasons.

I would like to single out Edward's reference to the term transcendental, referring to Waldo's lecture and making his own connection with German idealism. He seems to be very aware not only of its conceptual origins, but also of the influence of this philosophy on young New England intellectuals. This is suggested when he says, in a critical and demanding way, to Charles, "you who are of the new philosophy" (Letter EBE, P.R., to CCE, n.p, Oct. 29, 1833). Even though he appreciates and values Waldo's philosophical-religious wisdom (i.e., "in your philosophic & religious shades"), these comments to Waldo and to Charles also reflect his intellectual distance from, or ambivalence toward, this new philosophy. Transcendentalism in New England was essentially developed after Edward's death in 1834,
but his life was embedded in personal and social contexts that could foster these spiritual and philosophical ideas and a congenial attitude toward them. However, it is also possible that, had he lived long, the intellectual distance mentioned might have prevailed. It is of symbolic importance, as indicative of this separation of opinion, that Edward's 1832 poem, "The Last Farewell," written "whilst sailing out of Boston harbor, bound for the Island of Porto Rico," was printed in 1840 in the first number of the quarterly journal of the Transcendentalists, The Dial.

While in the West Indies, Edward was confronted with several images of death. These include his visit to a "graveyard where some victims to consumption were laid who had come hither from New York" (St.C., Jan. 5 & 6, 1832); the death of Waldo's first wife, Ellen, who also had consumption or tuberculosis; the accidental death of a negro man and a mulatto woman killed during festivities; the Dance of Death in a street masque; the vigil over a dead woman's corpse in his own house; the death of José Dorado, the father-in-law of his employer, Sidney Mason; and the news of deaths from a cholera epidemic in Boston in August 1832. Only Ellen's death elicited in him a sentiment worth expressing in writing (St.C., Feb. 23. 1831). Dorado's death brought out an unemotional contrast with his own health and age (P.R., Sept. 19-20, 1831). In a letter to his brother William he sent his grateful regards to the doctor that counseled him to come to a place with warm weather and thus saved his life (Letter EBE, P.R., to WE, N.Y., Feb. 11, 1832). Only once did he express the hope of not dying in another country with people and customs so different from his own (Letter, EBE, P.R., to WE, N.Y., July 29, 1832), and this was to justify the inquiries he made to his brother about job opportunities in New York.

Thoughts about other cases of consumption provoked no expression of emotion in the texts concerning his own infirmity (with the exception of Ellen); not even when other close members of his family, like Waldo and Charles, were afflicted. On illness and death, Edward's discourse is characterized by a profound blunting or even silencing of affect. Why this solemn silence? Some possible answers are: an understandable evasion of tragic sense on the edge of the abyss; a concealment of the writing self (Hudspeth, 2010) that previously has lived an intense moment of insanity; or both. Can we let a text's voice be heard about its own silences? As a poet once said: "...and it is now my imminent death, which is saying in silence, come, but I make myself deaf" (Benedetti, 1995/2011, p. 14; free transl.). If health is the silence of the organs of the body (Canguilhem, 1989/2004, p. 49), silence as a response to degradation throws out the terrors of consumption and death; and it hides exclusion, social as well as personal.

Edward's ideas about death were partly shaped by his paternal aunt, even when they did not agree on many issues. In Edward's texts, her presence seems intriguing and enigmatic. Aunt Mary ("self-educated, widely read, formidable articulate, a tireless controversialist and vigorous theologian") was the person "who set the real intellectual standards" for the Emerson brothers (Richardson, 1995, p. 23). For Waldo, she was the Angel of Death, "death being for her the ultimate experience of life" (Richardson, 1995, p. 27). In a letter to Waldo, Edward used a morbid phrase: "the angel's arrow has pierced too deeply" (in French; Letter EBE, P.R., to RWE, B., Nov. 13, 1833). "The angel" refers to what Aunt Mary called "the angel of consumption." (Bosco & Myerson, 2006, p. 177). Edward had a conflictive relationship with Aunt Mary (Tolman & Forbes, 1929/2010). Cole (1998) points out that "as a Harvard student, Edward drove himself to make a mark on the world, repudiating Mary's counsel to inwardness and battling familiar symptoms of consumption" (p.182). In 1828, she considered his mental breakdown a punishment, "a Calvinistic-style stroke from God for his impiety... a response that created a breach between them for the remainder of Edward's life" (Bosco & Myerson, 2006, p. 27). Nevertheless, soon after his arrival in the Caribbean, Edward shared with Aunt Mary his thoughts concerning moral sense and limit experiences
Sentiment—that word which brings up your image...sentiment is eternal.—Yes, it is 'delightful' to meet, as you say, on our pilgrimage,—to speak or hail one another on this great sea & learn the destination of our several barks & strive to correct now & then a false reckoning of the moral latitude & longitude. But you overrated (or perhaps for my advantage preferred to appear so to do) the enjoyments of what you supposed my situation—I found when weakest—when nearest to the border line—so much of earth in me & so little of celestial buoyancy that I looked on this life—acquainted as I am with some of its darker passages—as on an unfinished feast & a half cultivated field to which I was willing if not anxious to return. Had I been more what I ought to be, I might perhaps have been able to lift the hand & eye of faith in the way you intimate. As it is, I linger content to exist... (Letter EBE, St.C., to MME, B., March 11, 1831)

Edward had descended previously into the darkness of the abyss. In May 1828 he suffered a complete mental collapse that required his being hospitalized for five months. This "manic depression" was attributed to his obsessive personality and to "the physical and mental exertion that he had applied to his studies" (Bosco & Myerson, 2006, pp. 220-225). At that time, Waldo recognized in Edward the "sadness of frustrated expectations." That 'sense of fatalism' can be recognized in his letters (Bosco & Myerson, 2006, p. 225). Before Edward's departure to the West Indies in December 1830, his brother Charles perceived the "sting of Death" on Edward but kept up his hopes based on Edward's calm spirit and strong faith (Bosco & Myerson, 2006, pp. 230-231). In a letter to Edward in St. Croix, on January 1831, Waldo's first wife Ellen, suffering the same "curse" and anticipating her own death, says in an intriguing manner: "One is a slow, uncertain death and an ill spent life, the other a quick and sure remedy or a certain and an (sic) not agreeable but more preferable death" (Bosco & Myerson, 2006, p. 232).

Edward's spirits rose and fell as the tides he observed. In January 1832, after ten months in Puerto Rico, he made an important reflection on his health and moral aspirations: "what extreme of folly to pretend on one hand to aspire after a noble & perfect character, & on the other to grumble at the great or little evils connected with our constitution or place" (P.R., Jan. 6, 1832). Edward's extended stay in Puerto Rico definitely prolonged his life. He felt physically better and temporarily invigorated (Letter EBE, P.R., to WE, N.Y., Feb. 11, 1832), but after Charles returned to Boston on April 1832, after a stay of almost four months, Edward felt lonelier than ever (P.R., April 10, 1832) and the longings for his friend Cunningham were accentuated (Letter EBE, P.R., to WE, N.Y., April 13, 1832). In July, he mentioned to his brother William his plans to return to practice law in New York (a desire that all his brothers opposed) and asserted with conviction that he would never consider the time passed in Puerto Rico as a loss (Letter EBE, P.R., to CCE, July 15, 1832). In the next letter to William, he recognized that his desire to go back to the law "can be frustrated" and expressed, again, the wonders of living in Puerto Rico's fine weather, despite his limited respect toward the people and its culture (Letter EBE, P.R., to WE, N.Y., July 29, 1832). Quickly thereafter he returned to New York and Boston, but only briefly, during the late summer and fall of 1832.

Nine months later, back in Puerto Rico (July 1833), Edward again expressed regret to be on the island due to his poor health. Even though he ascribed it to the burden of his obsessive working habits and some fundamental personal defect (i.e., moral, physical, or intellectual), he still found himself in the dark as to the real cause (Letter EBE, P.R., to CCE,
n.p., July 27, 1833). This darkness was clearly perceived by his brothers: "I think his letters breathe rather a melancholy strain. And what wonder? To be poor & dependant is hard, hard enough. But to be besides a banished man..." (Letter CCE, B., to WE, N.Y., Sept. 9, 1833; MHi Ms N-251 {297}). Edward even wrote to William that he felt his continued presence in the Caribbean only prolonged an existence of little benefit (Letter EBE, P.R., to WE, N.Y., Sept. 29-Oct. 17, 1833). This marked the beginning of Edward's final year.

**Conclusion**

This essay has explored Edward Emerson's journal through the methodology of qualitative content analysis (Patton, 2002), focused on the themes of naturalism and American Exceptionalism, and a consideration of the text as evidence of a liminal life-death event.

The chosen methodology of content analysis has proven to be worthwhile for the philosophical and critical understanding of Edward's texts. The decision was made early to consider the diary as an example of a liminal event. After creating a preliminary conceptual scheme based on the first encounter with Edward's diary, a set of pre-comprehension questions (e.g., How does Edward endure the limit situation of an almost terminal sickness? How are the notions of naturalism and Transcendentalism projected in the texts?), and related themes (e.g., religious and intellectual ideas, humankind notions, nature and landscape views) were developed—as has been previously illustrated. From this perspective, a series of categories for textual analysis were generated following the themes of naturalism (e.g., beauty, power, wildness) and Transcendentalism (e.g., divinity in nature, intimation with nature), as well as the aspects of health, consumption, and death. The diary was systematically examined using these categories and clusters of meaningful data-imprints commonalities were generated, continuing the dialogical process of both textual reduction (e.g., descriptions of trees and old people) and emergent novel sets (e.g., archetypes). Following this path, other categories were brought forward (e.g., sociological narratives, expressions of contempt) and the theme of American Exceptionalism emerged as an important topic.

In summary, Edward was actively engaged in the genres of travel and nature writing. Walking and writing contributed both to his health and to recording and sharing his observations and evaluations of new lands and their peoples. Edward's nature writing is characterized by the point-of-view of an illustrated traveler and of a literary mind; variations in the quality of language style and usage; a sociological understanding interlaced with a rich environmental imagination; Edenic references complemented by images of rupture; descriptions of landscapes that juxtapose memories of New England and the Mediterranean; emotional reactions to nature's power, wonder and beauty; perceptions of atmosphere and weather highly impinged upon by his infirmities; a preference for antiquity and tradition in which tress are revered; insights on nature such as the enduring power of art; and, finally, a controlled expression of invalidism, that silently disguises death's personal face and conforms to the myth of the tragic hero.

Edward's texts reveal prejudiced contempt toward the people and culture of Puerto Rico and show a sense of superiority that reflects ideas on American Exceptionalism. His elitism and Unitarian religious heritage play a significant role in his notion of personal and social striving toward moral perfection, which is a key ideological feature of U.S. exceptionalism. In this sense, the present analysis suggests some anticipation of the discourse of those political constructions. However, Edward's beliefs in human perfectibility are better characterized as a religious model of absolute moral conceptions with nationalistic undertones, rather than as an anticipation of the ideology of Manifest Destiny.
Transcendentalist ideas are not manifested in Edward's nature writing. For example, the examined texts show no evidence of a conception of nature based on the divine, a central notion among Transcendentalist nature writers. However, his philosophical thoughts are conceptually germane to the new philosophy emerging within his New England social and cultural milieu. In general, his intellectual discourse mainly reflects contemporary ideas. Nevertheless, the enunciated reverence toward trees and respect for elders, the reflections on brotherhood and the enduring power of art, his arguments over the faculty of reason, and his philosophy of life are evidence of Edward's creativity as a thinker until the end of his life. Impending doom seemed to stimulate in him a longing for past and unfulfilled intellectual expectations. Edward's liminal intimations of mortality and tragic sense elicit a textual solemn silence on consumption and death.

To close the hermeneutic circle of textual comprehension (Gadamer, 1986/2002) and as an instance of dialogic creative movement (Lautman, 2006/2011), an important question arises. Does the philosophical idea of the tragic hero (as in Aristotle's Poetics, Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit, and Nietzsche's The Birth of Tragedy) apply to Edward's life and demise? Tragedy involves a great person who experiences a reversal of fortune that could be the product of a character flaw or a mistake. Edward was recognized: as "a living type of noble ambition and refinement" (Margaret Fuller); as one "among the rising lights and hopes of our American republic of letters... of a very superior nature intellectually and morally" (Edward Everett); and "a beautiful countenance full of force & fire, yet of an almost feminine refinement" (Frederick H. Hedge) (all quoted by Bosco & Myerson, 2006, pp. 67-71). Edward battled with frail health to attain academic and professional distinction, but at age twenty-three, he suffered a devastating reversal of fortune (a mental breakdown) that was ascribed to his ambitions and obsessive personality. Thus, in Edward's tragedy, the character's downfall is brought about by an internal cause and cannot be characterized as a misadventure. While Edward was recovering his reason and health, but returning also to his old hard-working ways, consumption placed him near an abyss. The tragic hero was called to adventure by a messenger of medicine: go to warm climates or face death. The journey was towards an uncertain destiny in which he faced the trial of a further intellectual degradation (labor as a clerk). He survived a severe challenge and prolonged his existence. Edward enjoyed for a short while the companionship of his brother Charles and of his dear friend Winthrop Cunningham. Their departure left him alone with his fate. The tragic protagonist confronted the decision to return to the ordinary world (home) or face his tragic destiny in the world of adventure (the tropics). A tragic hero evokes pity or fear. In Edward's case it was pity: "his destiny was a sort which cast a mournful and tender interest round him" (Fuller); "too soon, alas, the bright prospect was clouded" (Everett); and "his death... was hastened by grief for his failed ambition" (Hedge). At the end, Edward remained faithful to his passions. His inner compulsions determined the progress towards self-knowledge and demise. Evoking Shakespeare's Hamlet, Everett depicted Edward's tragic sense: "that unmatched form & feature of blown youth, blasted with ecstasy" (Bosco & Myerson, 2006, p. 69).

References


**Author Note**

Raul Mayo-Santana, Master of Science and PhD in Developmental Psychology and Statistics from State University of New York at Albany, postgraduate training on Neuropsychology, and Master of Arts in Philosophy from the University of Puerto Rico. The author is a founder and past director of the Institute of the History of the Health Sciences at the UPR Medical Sciences Campus. He is one of the editors of *A Sojourn in Tropical Medicine. Francis W. O'Connor Diary of a Porto Rican Trip, 1927*, and has published, as co-author, four books and several articles on the history of slavery in Puerto Rico, as well as articles and books in other areas, including a biographical book.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to the following address: University of Puerto Rico School of Medicine Department of Physical Medicine, Rehabilitation and Sports Medicine, School of Medicine, Medical Sciences Campus University of Puerto Rico, PO Box 365067, San Juan, Puerto Rico 00936-5067.

E-mail: raul.mayo@upr.edu

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