

Winslow Homer and the New England Poets

DAVID TATHAM

WINSLOW HOMER was a book illustrator, off and on, for thirty years. Excluding the copy work of his apprenticeship, he contributed a total of 100 original drawings to thirty books.¹ His earliest book illustrations were drawn in 1857 when he was twenty-one and just embarking on a career as a free-lance graphic artist; his last in 1886 when he was nearing fifty and firmly established as a leading American painter. Of the thirty books for which he made drawings, only five were wholly illustrated by him; the others include the work of one or more other artists as well.² Despite the skill and seriousness of purpose he brought to them, Homer's book illustrations have always remained in the shadow of his paintings and other graphic works. This has been so because they are among the smallest of his

This paper was read at the annual meeting of the American Antiquarian Society on October 17, 1979.

¹ This count does not include books reprinting previously published illustrations or books with drawings not made expressly to illustrate a text. Important but incomplete lists of Homer's book illustrations, each containing useful information not found in the others, are Frank Jewett Mather, Jr., 'Winslow Homer as a Book Illustrator,' *Princeton University Library Chronicle* 1(Nov. 1938):15-32; Sinclair Hamilton, *Early American Book Illustrators and Wood Engravers*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958-68), 1:149-52; 2:94-96; and Mavis P. Kelsey, *Winslow Homer Graphics* (Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1977), pp. 39-44. Each of these lists includes books the present writer excludes from his count for reasons given above.

² The five books wholly illustrated by Homer (each with more than a frontispiece) are *The Eventful History of Three Little Mice and How They Became Blind* (Boston: E. O. Libby & Co., 1858); [Increase Niles Tarbox,] *The Story of Our Darling Nellie* (Boston: Henry Hoyt, 1858); John Esten Cooke, *Surry of Eagle's-Nest* (New York: Bunce and Huntington, 1866); Virginia Wales Johnson, *The Christmas Stocking* (New York: Wilcox and Rockwell, 1869); and James Russell Lowell, *The Courtin'* (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1874). All but the Cooke and Lowell books are juveniles.

works, the most varied in style, the least independent (since they are parts of books), and the least documented. For many of them not a shred of evidence has surfaced to illuminate the circumstances of their origins.

During these same years, Homer contributed over 300 other drawings to periodicals such as *Harper's Weekly*, but these for the most part are popular prints rather than illustrations, for although they are in a sense illustrative of American life, they are not illustrations of a text.³ With rare exceptions, only in his book illustrations did Homer work from literary sources.⁴ His aim in these instances was that of any book illustrator: to vivify some aspect of a text by creating a complementary pictorial analogue to it. For this reason, each of his book illustrations is incomplete by itself, depending as it does for some of its interest and meaning on the viewer's knowledge of the words that were Homer's point of departure.

Among the texts Homer illustrated were a small number of poems by distinguished British and American poets, including the reigning bards of New England, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, James Russell Lowell, and John Greenleaf Whittier. He also illustrated poems by the New Yorker William Cullen Bryant, whose ties to his native New England, though faded, were visible at least to compilers of books of poetry. Homer's illustrations for poems by these patriarchs of American verse amount to drawings published in six books between 1869 and 1877 for two of Longfellow's poems, two of Bryant's, and one each by Lowell and Whittier. The poems had first been published without illustrations six to thirty-five years earlier. There is no reason to think that Homer consulted with any of the poets concerning the drawings he made for their verse.

³ For an extensive list of Homer's periodical illustrations, see Kelsey, *Graphics*, pp. 21-38.

⁴ An exception to this is his group of illustrations for Ella Rodman's *The Mistress of the Parsonage*, which was serialized in *Harper's Weekly* in February and March 1860, but apparently never published as a book. Homer's periodical drawings are sometimes accompanied by texts written after the drawings were made.

These new printings of old poems, now enriched with pictures, were occasioned by the annual need of publishers at Christmastime for gift books. These were deluxe editions of one or more short pieces, mostly reprints, by eminently respectable authors of the past and present, profusely illustrated with wood engravings. They were printed from electrotypes in an artful if somewhat anemic typographic design, often on calendered paper, and were machine-bound in cloth or morocco, invariably with beveled edges and elaborate gilt blocking. Invariable too was the practice of postdating them; to preserve their freshness as gifts for the New Year, they were published in the autumn with the coming year on their title-pages. They were the progeny of the literary annuals that had flourished in America from the late 1820s to the mid-1850s, but unlike *The Token* and *The Amaranth* and their sisters, the gift books of the 1860s and '70s were not part of a uniform series and were not meant to be read so much as looked at. They were, at heart, decorative objects whose function was to reflect from parlor tables and bookcases the literary and artistic good taste of their bestowers and recipients. Those who chose to read them were not likely to find them taxing, however, for as a rule the texts were brief. That of the gift-book edition of Lowell's *The Courtin'*, which was illustrated by Homer, consists of fewer than 600 words.

It is easy to disparage the gift books of the 1860s and '70s for their genteel meretriciousness, and to enumerate those many aspects of their design and manufacture that fell into bad odor once the purifying ideals of the Arts and Crafts Movement infiltrated the book trade in the '90s. But hard as they are to love, gift books merit serious study. They represent the first broadly sustained efforts by American trade publishers to mass-produce books as works of art inside and out, and they contain a good deal of original work by many of the most able graphic artists of the era. They are important also for the light they shed on the Americanization of an English model, since the

concept of the gift book, beginning with the literary annual, had come to America from England. For the most part, American publishers were content to import gift books, or to pirate their texts and illustrations, and even those who brought forth largely native products followed British models closely in appearance and tone. But in the years immediately following the Civil War, a few American publishers took pains to issue gift books that in text and pictures were meant to be distinctively American. It was to this end that Homer, whose reputation as a quintessentially American artist was well established by the late 1860s, was commissioned to illustrate the American poets with whom we are concerned.

Poetry poses special problems for the illustrator. Chief among them is this: that quality of verse that is poetic, that enables poetry to 'tell us . . . something that cannot be said' (Edwin Arlington Robinson), is more often than not diminished by the need of illustrators to particularize. Mindful of this, publishers of gift books sometimes sought to avoid the problem by choosing a scheme of ornamentation, rather than illustration, for books of verse; at other times they called for a kind of pictorial decoration that would, it was hoped, parallel the spirit of the verse without actually depicting anything specific in it. At a lower level of inspiration, publishers settled for a portrait of the poet or the poet's home. Whittier, who of our four poets was friendliest to illustration, greatly admired the little landscape views the artist Harry Fenn provided for some of his poems, as well he should have, for they are fine things of their kind, though part of his happiness with them surely derived from the way in which these distantly observed views of places described in his verse hover respectfully at the edges of the central ideas of the poetry and rarely intrude.⁵ Homer, as

⁵ Whittier praises Fenn in the prefaces to the illustrated edition of his *Snow-Bound* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1867) and his *Ballads of New England* (Boston: Fields, Osgood & Co., 1870), and in letters to Celia Thaxter (Nov. 11, 1869) and William Dean Howells (May 12, 1863). John B. Pickard, *Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 3:202-3, 299-300.

we shall see, was a bolder artist and sought to pictorialize the hearts of the poems he illustrated.

Whittier warmed to illustration rather more than did Bryant, Longfellow, or Lowell, each of whom, in his way, seems to have been of two minds about it—wary of it, knowing its power to subvert verse that each knew was capable of standing alone, and drawn to it, knowing its power to enhance reputations and enrich pocketbooks. Their publishers, who had found profit in illustrated editions of American poetry, were more single-minded about it, and on occasion needed to be dissuaded from commissioning illustrations. When, in 1854, Bryant's new publisher, D. Appleton, agreed to bring out a new edition of his poems without pictures, the poet was pleased enough to write about it to his friend Richard Henry Dana. Referring to illustrated verse, he said, 'There is, I suppose, a class of readers, at least of book-buyers, who like things of that kind, but the first thing which my publisher . . . has promised to do is to get out a neat edition, in two volumes, without illustrations.'⁶

Bryant, who had already been extensively illustrated, became a favorite of gift-book publishers after the Civil War. In 1870, the Appleton firm fashioned a holiday book from his poem *The Song of the Sower*.⁷ Of the forty-two illustrations that grace the forty pages of text, three are by Homer. The remainder are the work of seven other artists, some of them, like Homer, members of the National Academy; nine wood engravers cut the artists' drawings.⁸ Some of the drawings effec-

⁶ Quoted in Grant Overton, *Portrait of a Publisher and the First Hundred Years of the House of Appleton* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1925), p. 38.

⁷ *The Song of the Sower* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1871 [copr. 1870]). Homer's illustrations appear on pp. 17, 19, and 29. The book was priced at \$5.00 in cloth and \$9.00 in morocco. In a review in *Literary World* (Dec. 1870), p. 14, it is singled out as a 'purely American book' and 'by far the handsomest holiday book that has made its appearance this season.'

⁸ In addition to Homer, the illustrators are Bushing, Harry Fenn, Casimir Clayton Griswold, William J. Hennessy, John Augustus Hows, Victor Nehlig, and Granville Perkins. The wood engravers are Charles Edmonds, Augustus Fay, John Filmer, Joseph Harley, John Karst, C. D. Kingdom, James Langridge, William J. Linton, and Frederick W. Quarterly.

tively illustrate the passages they depict, but, as a suite to accompany the entire poem, they lack consistency of style and interpretation. The rapid advance of their sequence, which brings forth a new picture every few lines, and their large scale in relation to the text, underscore the problem. Consider the six illustrations (figs. 1a-f) for the twenty-nine lines that constitute part III of the poem. In this section Bryant briefly considers the destructiveness of war. He wrote the poem in 1859; when it was published in his book *Thirty Poems* in 1864, section III was grimly pertinent to the American Civil War.

The first illustration is Homer's. To depict the phrases 'strength of armies' and 'tented field,' it shows an American Civil War camp. It was adapted by Homer from sketches he made in Virginia in 1862 while visiting the Sixty-first New York Volunteers. That regiment's numerals appear in reverse on the packs of the soldiers at left. They are in reverse owing to an egregious error by John Karst, the wood engraver.⁹ Overleaf, an illustration by Victor Nehlig for the words 'mortal strife' shows what appear to be Spanish conquistadores amidst the wreckage of battle. It is as romantic a conception of war as Homer's is realistic. On the next page is an illustration by Homer of Bryant's lines about warriors' blood:

Such as, on Solferino's day,
Slaked the brown sand and flowed away;—
Flowed till the herds on Mincio's brink,
Snuffed the red stream and feared to drink;—

Bryant refers to the Battle of Solferino between the Austrians and the allied forces of the French and Piedmontese in the War of 1859 in Italy. Homer's powerful drawing of frightened cattle includes as a detail an army cap that could as well be American as French; he surely meant it to allude to battles in the American Civil War in which the slaughter was equally as fearful as at Solferino. On the next page, a drawing by Nehlig

⁹ Homer may have failed to reverse the numerals in his drawing, but the responsibility for ensuring that the block would print an acceptable image was the engraver's.

for the line 'and chieftains to the war shall lead' presents a plumed, mounted commander of lance-carrying troops of no specific time or place. Facing it, an illustration by John Augustus Hows treats Bryant's hope that man may 'lay the sword away' by showing birds nesting in a mortar in a semitropical gun emplacement. The sweetness of the sentiment in this concept seems more than Bryant's verse calls for. The section concludes with an allegorical illustration: William J. Hennessy's ensphered personification of 'pelting hail and riving blast.' The faint echoes of William Blake in this drawing stem from the fervent advocacy of that artist by Hennessy's engraver and relative by marriage, William J. Linton. Linton himself was a distinguished illustrator of verse, and rather more adept at emulating Blake than was Hennessy. There is something to be said in defense of each of these six illustrations, Homer's above all, but as a group they lack cohesion and burden rather than enhance the poem. Homer's illustrations are the strongest not only because of his graphic skills but also because his drawings are rooted more in experience than art. His third drawing, a picture of a factory girl, appears later in the book, illustrating the lines '. . . those who throw / The clanking shuttle to and fro, / In the long row of humming rooms.'

What Bryant thought about *Songs of the Sower* in its new dress is not known, but the Appleton firm thought well enough of its sales to bring out the following year a gift-book edition of another of his poems, *The Fountain*. The book repeats the design and the faults of its predecessor. Homer contributed three drawings of young women and children out of doors. They match the spirit of Bryant's lines but not the work of the other four artists in the book.¹⁰

The disparity in the character of the illustrations in most gift

¹⁰ *The Story of the Fountain* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1872 [copr. 1871]). Homer's illustrations appear on pp. 38, 39, and 42. In addition to Homer, the illustrators were Fenn, Hows, Perkins, and Alfred Fredericks. The wood engravers were Alfred Bobbett, Edmonds, Harley, Horace Harral, Karst, Langridge, W. J. Linton, and his brother Henry Linton.

books was noted in contemporary reviews, sometimes admirably and occasionally critically.¹¹ To the extent that it was accepted as a problem, it was open to solution by the use of a single illustrator for a single poem, but most gift-book publishers were reluctant to resort to this seemingly simple and time-honored corrective for two reasons. First, they were in the habit of classifying illustrators as either landscape or figure artists, and then further categorizing them by subject specialties, parcelling out passages of verse according to an artist's known affinity with the subject of the passage (but with precious little regard for his affinity with the work of his neighbors). For the Bryant books, the Appleton firm asked Homer to portray men at war and children at play because he was already noted for these subjects by the late 1860s. Second, publishers in their advertisements made a strong selling point of an array of illustrators for a single book. It reinforced the sense of plenty that was a hallmark of the product. An important model for them in this respect had been the Moxon Tennyson published in London in 1857 with illustrations by eight artists, three of the Pre-Raphaelites among them.¹² Once established as a basis of competition in America in the mid-1860s, the practice of fielding teams of illustrators, with as many stars as possible, was hard to abandon.

Some of the first timid steps toward a reform of the genre can be seen in the gift books published in Boston beginning in the late 1860s by Fields, Osgood and Company, successors to Ticknor and Fields, the house to which Longfellow, Lowell, and Whittier were bound by contract. A major share of the credit for the design of these books belongs to Andrew Varick Stout Anthony, a wood engraver and artist who joined the firm in 1865, cut a drawing of Homer's in that year, and, engraving all the while, rapidly rose to a position that amounted to art

¹¹ For a thoughtful critical comment, see 'Illustrated Books,' reprinted from *The Riverside Bulletin* in *The Weekly Trade Circular*, No. 22 (Nov. 28, 1872), p. 585.

¹² Alfred Tennyson, *Poems* (London: E. Moxon, 1857). Earlier Moxon editions of Tennyson do not have these illustrations.

director for illustrated books.¹³ He commissioned illustrations from Homer for four volumes between 1869 and 1877. No correspondence between Homer and Anthony about these books seems to have survived, but some information about their manufacture is preserved in the Ticknor firm's cost books in the Houghton Library.¹⁴

The first of the four books is Whittier's *Ballads of New England*, published in the fall of 1869.¹⁵ Anthony made use of

¹³ Anthony (1835–1906) moved to Boston ca. 1865 after success as a wood engraver in New York in the 1850s and early '60s. He was doubtless acquainted with Homer there. For the gift book *Gems from Tennyson* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1866 [copr. 1865]), which reproduced some illustrations from the 1857 Moxon Tennyson and added new ones by American artists, Anthony engraved a drawing by Homer for the poem *The Charge of the Light Brigade*. It seems to have been a last-minute addition to the book, apparently replacing a drawing by Elihu Vedder. Payment for the Vedder drawing, with the notation that it was unused, appears in the Ticknor firm cost books (Houghton Library ms.Am.1185.6(4), p. 180). Payments to artists, with no mention of Homer, are recorded between Mar. 24 and Aug. 8, 1865. The book was printed in an edition of four thousand copies in September 1865. Anthony was a close friend of James Ripley Osgood, a partner in the Ticknor firm and its successors from 1864 to 1880. In Boston, Osgood resided with the Anthonys; they named their son Ripley Osgood after him. In 1880 Anthony left Houghton, Mifflin, successors to Houghton, Osgood, to join Osgood in his new, but short-lived, publishing firm in Boston. Anthony's later career was with Harper Brothers in New York. Much about Osgood, and less about Anthony, is included in Ellen B. Ballou, *The Building of the House* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970). There is no reason to think that Anthony selected the subjects of the gift books whose illustration he supervised.

¹⁴ Two letters of uncertain date and subject from Homer to Anthony seem not to relate to the books in question but suggest that the working relationship between the two men was a cordial one. One letter reads, 'April 27th My dear Mr. Anthony I have received your letter & the blocks. If July will do for the drawings I will do them. I leave tomorrow for Norfolk V.A. I am sorry it should have happened so. If you should want the blocks (which I have not opened) send word to Mr. E. W. Perry [Enoch Wood Perry, the artist] & he will return them to you.' (Boston Public Library, ms.Ch.F.4.86.) Homer visited Virginia during the Civil War and again in the mid-1870s. The other letter reads, 'Feby 17th Scarboro, Me. Dear Anthony The only photograph I have that has been taken in late years was spoiled by touching up & have only had one taken since 1867. I will send you one the next good chance I have, but it will not be before next summer.' (Houghton Library, ms Rogers Room.) The Ticknor firm cost books (ms.Am.1185.6) are quoted by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

¹⁵ John Greenleaf Whittier, *Ballads of New England* (Boston: Fields, Osgood & Co., 1870 [copr. 1869]). Homer's illustrations appear on pp. 18 and 19. All of the book's illustrations were engraved by Anthony and his unidentified assistants. Payments to individual artists are not recorded. The total cost of artists' drawings was \$652; for the engraving of them on wood, \$2,200. The cost per copy of the first printing of 7,850 copies was \$1.33. Bound in cloth the book sold for \$5.00. Cost book ms.Am.1185.6(5), p. 223.

nine artists, but his rationale in assigning them passages of poetry imposed on the book's pictorial matter a sense of order that was rare in its time.¹⁶ He commissioned the landscape artist Harry Fenn to supply each of the book's ten poems with a landscape view as a headpiece and also, for all but one of the poems, a landscape vignette as a tailpiece. These drawings set the stage for each ballad's action and provide a pictorial epilogue to it. Thus bracketed, the action of each poem was illustrated by one or, if it was long enough, two figure artists. Fenn's landscapes are all similar in size and tonality; recurring every few pages, they unify the book. The differing styles of the figure artists, for the most part restricted to a single poem, provide variety.

Homer's two illustrations (figs. 2a-b) are for Whittier's *My Playmate*, a poem first published in 1860. Fenn's headpiece is a view of the pine-clad Ramoth Hill first mentioned in the poem's opening stanza: Homer's pair of illustrations face each other on the next two pages. In the first of these, the two children of the poem—the poet as a child and his playmate—stand before Homer's version of Ramoth Hill. In the second, the playmate, now mature and well-to-do, sits at an awkward angle in a chair. Homer includes a cactus and palm trees to support the poem's unspecific reference to a climate warmer than New England's. He was unaware that Whittier had Kentucky in mind.¹⁷

The apparent simplicity (achieved by sophisticated means) of both illustrations is in accord with the poem's ballad meter and naiveté of sentiment. The quietness and psychological remoteness of the figures perhaps result from Homer's understanding that these characters exist only in the poet's memory, and that there is no narrative in this ballad outside his reveries.

¹⁶ The other artists, in addition to Homer, are Fenn, Fredericks, Perkins, Sol Eytinge, Jr., F. O. C. Darley, Samuel Colman, and John W. Ehninger. Decorations not related to the poems are by John Harley.

¹⁷ The playmate has been identified as Mary Emerson (Smith) Thomas. Samuel T. Pickard, *Whittier-Land* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin & Co., 1904), pp. 66, 67.

The white masses of the sky and the painter-like blocking-in of forms is typical of Homer's work as a graphic artist, but it is not seen in the work of the book's other illustrators. Fenn's tailpiece returns the reader to the landscape.

Reviews in the press and trade journals commended everything about the book. They heaped praise on Fenn's illustrations in particular, as Whittier himself had already done in the book's preface. *The Nation*, whose reviews were more discerning than most, described Homer's figures as 'simple and natural,' and said that they 'show his power, almost unequalled among painters, as a draughtsman of expression.'¹⁸ This power of Homer's has not often been remarked on in the twentieth century, but it remains a major strength of his book illustrations, as will be even more evident in those that follow.

In the fall of 1870, Fields, Osgood brought out *Winter Poems by Favorite American Poets*.¹⁹ The poets are the four already mentioned, with the addition of Emerson. Anthony's scheme for this book was simplicity itself. Each of the book's nine poems was illustrated by a single artist, each of whom was relied on to find his way in both landscape and figure subjects.²⁰ Homer's illustrations (figs. 3a-f) consist of six drawings for Longfellow's *The Golden Mile-Stone*, a poem first published in 1858.

On the poem's first page, Homer's headpiece surmounts the first four of the poem's twelve stanzas. It is a view in the Fenn manner, but more ambitious. Homer incorporates into the

¹⁸ *The Nation*, Dec. 16, 1869, p. 539. See also *The Atlantic Monthly*, Dec. 1869, pp. 767-68; *American Bibliopolist* 1 (Nov. 1869), p. 348.

¹⁹ *Winter Poems by Favorite American Poets* (Boston: Fields, Osgood & Co., 1871 [copr. 1870]). Homer's illustrations, engraved by Anthony, appear on pp. 21-24. Payments to individual artists are not recorded in the cost-book entry. The total cost of artists' drawings was \$692; of their engraving on wood, \$2,033. The cost per copy of the first printing of 4,500 copies was \$1.35. Bound in cloth, the book sold for \$5.00. Cost book ms.Am.1185.6(6), p. 19.

²⁰ The artists in addition to Homer are Fenn, Fredericks, Griswold, Hennessy, Eytinge, and Jervis McEntee. A single drawing by Homer Dodge Martin, perhaps an Adirondack subject, is also included, but because it is not a winter scene it may not have been commissioned for the poem with which it appears.

drawing the title of the poem and a rustic initial letter for the first line. These elements are in letterpress elsewhere in the book. From a chimney top in the right foreground, billowing black smoke sweeps sharply across the page to the left. In the less turbulent air of the middle distance, Homer has depicted a passage from the second stanza: 'From the hundred chimneys of the village, / . . . / Smoky columns / Tower aloft into the air of amber.'

On the next two pages, each of four stanzas opens with the same words, 'by the fireside,' and describes a domestic scene. The first two of these treat the disillusionment of maturity and the overreaching aspirations of youth. The third concerns marital strife. The 'peace and comfort' of the fourth stanza is muted by the quiet anxiety of its 'waiting and watching.' It is not a cheerful poem. Homer fleshes out these scenes with four illustrations, intensifying the emotional content of the poetry through the expression of faces and hands, and the relation of figures to one another and also to the characterful chairs they sit in. Homer's use of chairs, stools, and sofas to reinforce or otherwise comment on the feelings of those who sit on them is quite remarkable. It is seen in a number of his other illustrations, as well as in several watercolors later in the 1870s.²¹

Homer compresses the elements of these four illustrations into shallow, oblong pictorial spaces in which the top margin presses downward on the heads of the figures, adding to the sense of unease that runs through this section of the poem. The scene of marital discord is unique in Homer's work. Nowhere else does he portray realistically such emotions as the rage of the scowling husband or the suppressed feelings of the wife who turns away from him. She holds the back of her chair as

²¹ For example, *Backgammon*, 1877, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, reproduced in E. P. Richardson, *American Art*, exhibition catalogue (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums, 1976), p. 169; *Girl with a Letter*, 1879 private collection, reproduced in Lloyd Goodrich, *Winslow Homer* (New York: George Braziller, 1959), fig. 31; and *Woman Peeling a Lemon*, 1876, Clark Art Institute, reproduced in Egbert Haverkamp-Begemann et al., *Drawings from the Clark Art Institute*, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964) 2: plate 192.

closely as do the ties of the cushion cover on which she sits. It is hard to think of another American illustrator of the era who could have avoided the sentimental qualities of the poem so successfully, or reached so directly into its darker feelings. Few American poets have been so well served by an illustrator as has Longfellow in these drawings. It would be interesting to know what he thought of them, for he kept a close and critical eye on the illustration of others of his books, but no letters from any hand have surfaced relating to this volume. Homer's tail-piece of a dying fire on the next page is an original concept; it is not mentioned or alluded to in the poem.

Forty-five hundred copies of *Winter Poems* were printed and issued in November 1870.²² Though most notices and reviews were brief and laudatory, one singling out the manliness of Homer's work, William Dean Howells in the *Atlantic Monthly* took the trouble to examine the book's illustrations in a little detail and had good things to say about Homer's four fireside scenes.²³ It is some measure of the quality of the era's criticism that no reviewer of the book mentioned that the stanzas of one of Whittier's well-known poems were printed in a confused order.²⁴

The third of the gift books is an edition of James Russell Lowell's *The Courtin'*, with the imprint of James R. Osgood and Company, successors to Fields, Osgood.²⁵ All of the poem's

²² See note 17.

²³ *The Nation*, Dec. 15, 1870, p. 409; *The Atlantic Monthly*, Feb. 1871, pp. 269-70.

²⁴ In Whittier's poem *In School Days*, the texts that should have appeared on p. 38 and on p. 39 were inadvertently transposed, removing the fourth stanza from its proper place and inserting it after the poem's ninth stanza. In later printings of the book, the wayward pages were put right.

²⁵ James Russell Lowell, *The Courtin'* (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1874 [copr. 1873]). The book is unpaginated. The Osgood firm paid \$200 for 'Drawings by Homer from Prang & Co.'; how much of this sum Homer received is not known, nor is the nature of Prang's involvement. The Heliotype Company, which was owned by Osgood, was paid \$800 for printing the plates. The cost per copy of the first printing of 2,000 copies was \$1.45. Bound in cloth, the book sold for \$3.00. Ticknor firm cost book, ms.Am.1185.6(6), p. 112. Louis Prang was a leading American publisher of lithographs, for whom Homer had drawn a number of Civil War subjects in 1862 and 1863, and with whom he maintained a correspondence for many years. In

seven illustrations (figs. 4b–h) are by Homer, as may also be the title-page vignette and the ornamental extra-title (fig. 4a). On the cover, Homer's name is more prominent than Lowell's but not inside. Altogether absent is the name of Homer Wilbur, the fictitious editor of Lowell's humorous *Biglow Papers*, in the second series of which the shorter, original version of the poem was first published in 1866. This gift-book edition was announced for publication in the fall of 1872, but in fact it did not appear until a year later in the fall of 1873, its title-page dated 1874. The cause of the delay was almost certainly the great Boston fire of November 1872 which, among other things, destroyed the stock of virtually every paper supplier in the city.²⁶ The book is among the most handsomely designed and illustrated of its age.

Homer's seven illustrations are silhouettes printed in black on a buff-colored tint. They are photomechanical reproductions by the heliotype process of original drawings now lost. Their razor-sharp outlines and deep, solid blacks are of a kind essential for the success of silhouettes. Homer's silhouettes are in the manner of the Polish-born German artist Paul Konewka. Konewka's work had become well known in America in the late 1860s through a series of imported gift books in which his silhouettes illustrated extracts from Goethe's *Faust* and a number of Shakespeare's plays.²⁷ Following his untimely death in

Ernest Edwards, *The Heliotype Process* (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1876), one of Homer's silhouettes for *The Courtin'*, is included as a specimen heliotype (pl. 18), identified as 'printed from stone,' meaning, apparently, that the heliotype gelatine matrix, made by a photographic-chemical process from Homer's original drawings, was used to transfer the image to a lithographic stone.

²⁶ The book was announced for publication in *The Literary Bulletin*, Oct. 1872, p. 6, and *The American Booksellers' Guide*, Nov. 1872, p. 394. In the latter, the book is not priced (though Osgood's other new publications are), which probably means that it had not been manufactured by the time this notice was sent to press. A list of the paper suppliers burned out in the fire of Nov. 9–10, 1872, appears in *The Weekly Trade Circular*, No. 22, Nov. 28, 1872, p. 585. Since *The Courtin'* evidently had not been printed before the fire, and the heavy plate paper required for it probably could not be obtained in time to have the book ready for the holiday market, publication was in all likelihood deferred to the next season.

²⁷ Four of Konewka's silhouette books had been published by Roberts Brothers in Boston: *Puck's Nightly Pranks* (1871); *Goethe's Faust* (1871); *Shakespeare's Midsummer-Night's Dream* (1870); and *Falstaff and His Companions* (1872).

1871, the Osgood firm moved to exploit the vogue for silhouette books by issuing one of its own. It would be interesting to know whether the idea for the book was Anthony's, Homer's, Louis Prang's (for he was involved at an early stage), Ripley Osgood's, or John Spencer Clark's (for both of these partners in the Osgood firm had a keen interest in illustrated books).²⁸ It was probably not Lowell's idea, as we shall see. Though Homer apparently had little if any prior experience in making silhouettes, his work is fully as accomplished as Konewka's. While the style of *The Courtin's* illustrations derives from the German artist, their content is as American as the stalks of corn—probably drawn by Anthony—that are part of the cover design.

As a rule, comic verse presents the illustrator with fewer abstractions needing to be made material than does serious verse, but it makes its own demands; among them is the need for the artist to share the poet's particular, and comic, understanding of human nature.

In his poem, Lowell recounts in rural Yankee dialect the culmination of Zekle's courtship of Huldy in the kitchen of a New England farmhouse on a winter evening. The ornamental foliage of the extra-title includes two crookneck squash; Lowell mentions these as 'agin the chimbley . . . hung' in his description of the kitchen. In the title-page vignette, two knives, two spoons, and a fork are arranged to create the superimposed initials *Z* and *H*. In the first of Homer's seven illustrations, Zekle peeks through the kitchen window while summoning up courage to propose to Huldy. The leafless state of the rose bush

²⁸ For Prang's involvement, see note 25. Osgood, who was the motivating force of the firm that bore his name, had an entrepreneur's interest in the technology of pictorial printing and made a success in America of the heliotype process, the first widely used means of printing photographically secured images from inked matrices. See note 25. Clark, a partner from 1866 to 1875 in the Ticknor firm and its early successors, was a discerning advocate of American illustration. For the firm's periodicals *Our Young Folks* and *Every Saturday* he bought drawings from artists he admired, including Homer, and then commissioned literary figures to write lines to accompany them. In 1874 Clark left the Osgood firm to join Louis Prang's lithograph publishing house in Boston.

affirms the season of the poem; its serpentine pattern is for decorative effect. The scraper is mentioned in the poem. Lowell describes what Zekle sees in a humorous redundancy, 'An' there sot Huldy all alone, / 'Ith no one nigh to hender.' He later describes her as peeling apples, which is how Homer shows her. In this and three later silhouettes, Homer uses Huldy's Windsor chair to underline the mood of the moment. When, in the next illustration, Huldy sits up straight on Zekle's entrance, her chair, now seen from a new angle, seems to do so too.

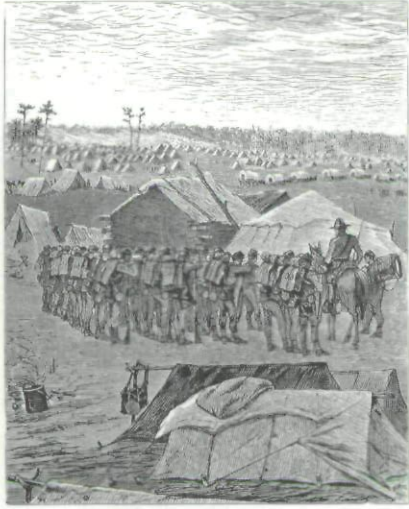
Homer's fourth illustration portrays Zekle in the midst of his awkward, circling conversation with Huldy:

He stood a spell on one foot fust,
 Then stood a spell on t'other,
 An' on which one he felt the wust
 He could n't ha' told ye nuther.
 Says he, I'd better call agin';
 Says she, 'Think likely, Mister';
 Thet last word pricked him like a pin,
 An' . . . Wall, he up an' kist her.

What Homer depicts in his fifth illustration is surely less of a kiss than Lowell had in mind, but in a closer contact the outline definition of facial features would have been lost. In settling for a peck rather than a kiss, Homer was being a good silhouette artist. In the sixth illustration, Homer shows Huldy immediately following Zekle's impulsive act. The poem assures the reader that she is not as unhappy as the silhouette might suggest:

When Ma bimeby upon 'em slips,
 Huldy sot pale ez ashes,
 All kin' o' smily roun' the lips
 An' teary roun' the lashes.

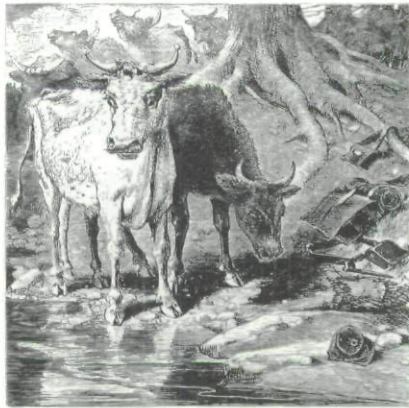
The last illustration, in which Homer shows the couple dressed for their wedding, depicts an event merely alluded to in the last lines of the poem:



a



b



c

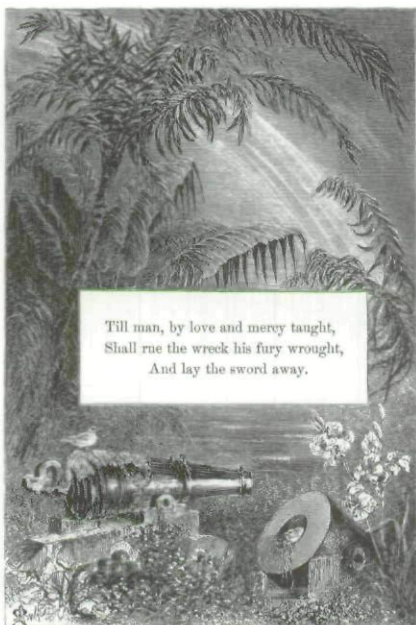
Figs. 1a–f. Six illustrations, engraved on wood, for part III of William Cullen Bryant's *Song of the Sower* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1871). a. Winslow Homer (engraved by John Karst), 'The tented field.' b. Victor Nehlig (engraved by John Filmer), 'Mortal strife.' c. Winslow Homer (engraved by Charles Edmonds), 'Snuffed the red stream and feared to drink.' d. Victor Nehlig (engraved by John Filmer), 'Chieftains to the war shall lead.' e. John Augustus Hows (engraved by W. J. Linton), 'And lay the sword away.' f. William J. Hennessy (engraved by W. J. Linton), 'Pelting hail and riving blast.'



d



f



e

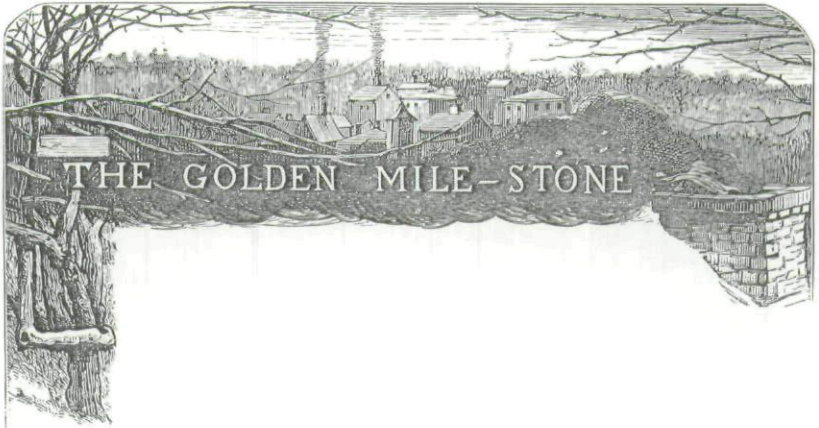


a



b

Figs. 2a–b. Two illustrations by Winslow Homer (engraved on wood by Andrew V. S. Anthony) for 'My Playmate' in John Greenleaf Whittier's *Ballads of New England* (Boston: Fields, Osgood & Co., 1870). a. *The Playmates*. b. 'She lives where all the golden year / Her summer roses blow.'



a



b



c

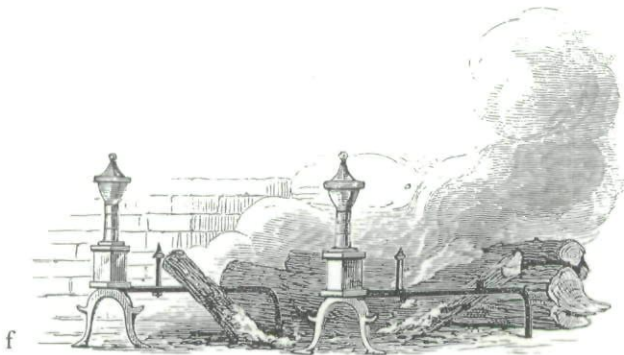
Figs. 3a-f. Six illustrations by Winslow Homer (engraved on wood by Andrew V. S. Anthony) for Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's 'The Golden Mile-Stone' in *Winter Poems* by



d

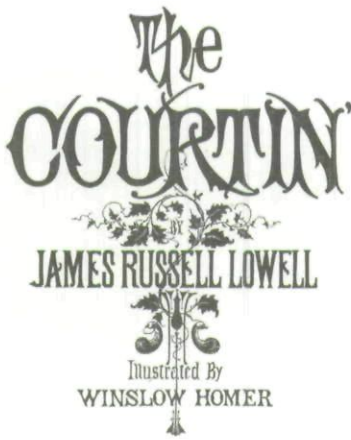


e



f

Favorite American Poets (Boston: Fields, Osgood & Co., 1871). a. Headpiece. b. 'Seeing ruined cities in the ashes.' c. 'Youthful dreamers.' d. 'Tragedies are acted.' e. 'Wives and children.' f. Tailpiece.



a



b



c



d

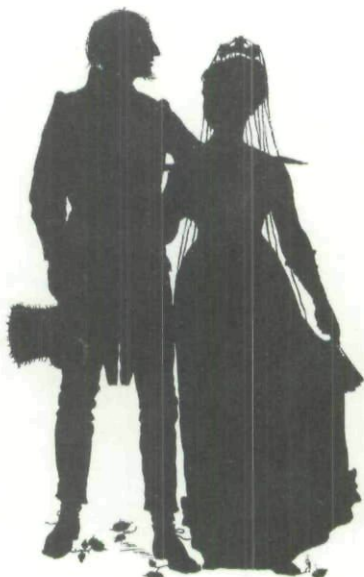
Figs. 4a–h. Seven illustrations by Winslow Homer and ornamental title page attributed to Homer for James Russell Lowell's *The Courtin'* (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1874). a. Ornamental title page, b. 'Zekle crep' up quite unbeknown / An' peeked in thru' the



f



e



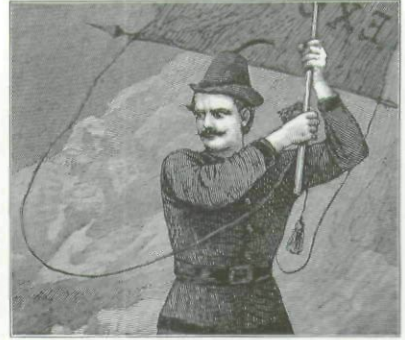
h

g

winder.' c. 'There sot Huldy all alone.' d. 'You want to see my Pa, I s'pose?' e. 'He stood a spell on one foot fust' or 'Says be, "I'd better call agin".' f. 'An' . . . Wal, be up an' kist ber.' g. 'An' teary roun' the lasbes.' h. 'In meetin' come nex' Sunday.'



a



b



c



d

Figs. 5a–d. Four illustrations by Winslow Homer (engraved on wood by Andrew V. S. Anthony) for Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's 'Excelsior,' published simultaneously in *Christmastide* and in *Excelsior* (both Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1878). a. 'A youth who bore, mid snow and ice.' b. 'His brow was sad; his eye beneath / Flashed like a falchion from its sheath.' c. "'O stay," the maiden said.' d. 'There in the twilight cold and gray, / Lifeless, but beautiful, he lay.'

An' all I know is they was cried
In meetin' come nex' Sunday.

In the *Atlantic Monthly*, Howells admired these illustrations, mentioning 'the grace with which a wandering tendril of hair, or a flying ribbon, or a curling length of apple peel may be shadowed forth.' But he had two reservations. The first concerned Huldy in the wedding scene where, Howells said, Homer had allowed 'the delicately managed character of Huldah to degenerate into caricature. Elsewhere he has expressed her country brightness and quickness, in which there is no vulgarity. . . .' Howells's other reservation concerned Zekle's costume, which he criticized as being that of the stage Yankee, meaning the comic stereotype established on the American stage in the 1830s by George Handel ('Yankee') Hill. This is a curious criticism, since Lowell's dialect verse has roots in the same source.²⁹

Lowell was abroad when the book was published and may not have seen a copy until his return to America in the spring of 1875. When he saw it he did not like it. In June 1875, after sending a copy of the book to Mrs. Sophia Herrick, then an editor of the *Southern Review*, he wrote to her, 'I meant to have torn out all the prints in the book (which are simply disgusting—especially that of *Zekle and Huldy*)—but I forgot it.'³⁰ It is not clear whether Lowell had in mind the illustrations of the kiss or the wedding; he might well have found one mildly salacious, the other mildly sacrilegious, and all seven rather vulgar. He may also have felt that his verse had been upstaged by

²⁹ *The Atlantic Monthly*, Feb. 1874, pp. 235–36.

³⁰ James Russell Lowell, *Letters of James Russell Lowell*, ed. Charles Eliot Norton, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1893) 2:139. The typewritten transcription of this letter for Norton's edition, with the addressee's name 'Mrs. Herrick' crossed-out, is in the Norton Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University. The poem had been illustrated on at least one occasion prior to the Osgood edition; a single illustration by Frank Beard appeared in *The Aldine* 5 (Feb. 1872), p. 1. Despite Lowell's dislike for them, the silhouettes were republished in collections of his verse in the 1870s and '80s, though the entire suite seems never to have been included in a single edition after its original publication.

Homer's illustrations. Charles Eliot Norton may not have liked them either. In editing his friend Lowell's letters for publication, he excised parts of them, including Mrs. Herrick's name in the letter just quoted, but he allowed to stand Lowell's expression of disgust at Homer's work. The wedding scene continued to be bothersome. In 1890, a decade and a half after its publication, Homer replied from his studio in Maine to a correspondent whose letter, now lost, touched on this subject. His humorously derisive reply reads in its entirety:

Madam

I have had an opportunity of seeing a copy of 'the Courtin.' I find that the silhouette to which you refer is very bad. I am not surprised at that in the least, & in reply to you will say, that the woman is going away from the man as fast as possible as, he is facing this way and she the other.

Yours respectfully
Winslow Homer³¹

The last of the four Anthony-designed gift books with illustrations by Homer is *Christmastide*, published by Osgood in October 1877.³² It is a collection of four poems, one each by Whittier, Longfellow, Lowell, and Thomas Bailey Aldrich. A separate edition of each of the poems printed from the same plates was simultaneously issued. The individual poems were priced at a dollar and a half a copy, *Christmastide* at five dollars. The eighty-four hundred copies sold rapidly; another thirty-five hundred were printed in December.³³ In design the book is a disappointment. The sense of order that Anthony had brought to gift-book illustration earlier in the decade is largely

³¹ Homer to an unidentified correspondent, May 21, 1890. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

³² *Christmastide* (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1878 [copr. 1877]). The book is unpaginated. All of the illustrations were engraved by Anthony and his assistants. The total cost of artists' drawings was \$738.50, of which Homer received \$100 for four drawings. The cost of wood engraving was \$1,917. The cost per copy of the first printing of 8,400 copies was \$1.275. Bound in cloth, the book sold for \$5.00. Cost book ms.Am.1185.6(8), pp. 328-29.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 329.

absent here. Each poem has five or more illustrators, assigned passages with no more logic than that which guided the Bryant books. The reforms (if such they were) that Anthony had helped bring about were short-lived.

Homer drew four illustrations (figs. 5a-d), for which he was paid a total of \$100, for Longfellow's *Excelsior*, a poem first published in 1841. Five other artists, including Thomas Moran and Alfred Waud, contributed ten other illustrations.³⁴ Longfellow's allegory of the man of genius contains a parade of images—an Alpine village, spectral glaciers, peasant maiden, pious monks, faithful hound—but they are, of course, symbolic, and the efforts of illustrators to objectify them is at cross-purposes with their figurative use by the poet. But the images and much else in the poem have always seemed a rich source for parody with the result that burlesques of *Excelsior* flourished in print, in art, and on the stage throughout the last half of the century.³⁵ Their popularity did not make Homer's task any easier.

Anthony's assignment of passages of verse to his illustrators resulted in some inconsistencies. As the chief figure artist for the poem, Homer, in the book's second illustration, defines the appearance of the youth 'who bore, mid snow and ice, / A banner with the strange device.' The same costume is seen in Moran's and Waud's portrayal of the youth, suggesting that Anthony either prescribed it or had Homer's drawing of it in hand to show the other artists before they began their own. But the same consistency does not extend to the maiden; Waud shows her in a Swiss peasant costume while Homer dresses her in New York fashion of the mid-1870s, though she stands in an Alpine snow field. Perhaps because little in the poem appealed

³⁴ The illustrators of *Excelsior* are, in addition to Homer, Alfred Waud (four illustrations), Thomas Moran (three), Jervis McEntee (one), Charles Kendrick (one), and Anthony (one). A vignette by F. T. Merrill is a decorative tailpiece rather than an illustration of the text.

³⁵ For example, the caricature of the youth as an Irishman in *High Art: Pictures from the Poets. From the Brush of Louis A. Roberts . . . and the Quill of Ikabod Ixax* [George Stanford Stebbins] (Springfield, Mass.: D. E. Fisk and Co., 1872), p. 54.

to Homer's realist temperament, he fell back on melodramatic posturings for the first three of the illustrations. Only in the last of the four does the drawing convey some of the sincerity of feeling that in both serious and humorous subjects is one of Homer's great strengths. The illustration is for the lines 'There in the twilight cold and gray, / Lifeless, but beautiful, he lay,' though the 'faithful hound' of the preceding stanza can also be seen, faintly, in the distance. Homer's drawings were rather coldly engraved, perhaps to suit the Alpine setting or, more likely, because Anthony's assistants were less resourceful in 1877 than they had been earlier in the decade. Trained as we are to expect evidence of ever-greater accomplishment in an artist's work as his career progresses, these illustrations are a disappointment after those Homer drew for *The Golden Milestone* and *The Courtin'*. There is less mental effort behind the *Excelsior* drawings. They contain no original insights of the kind that in his earlier illustrations brought new shadings of meaning to well-known poetry.

The twenty-six little drawings Homer made for gift-book poems are, of course, minor works of a major master, and incidental to his great achievements as a painter, but they are not incidental to any thoughtful consideration of the art of illustration in the nineteenth century. There can be no doubt that Homer took the challenges of illustrating poetry—of divining the heart of a poem and shaping his drawing to its nature—as seriously as any artist in America, and far more seriously than most. The best of his illustrations of poetry succeed so well in what they set out to do that they ensure Homer high rank in any history of American book illustration in which the sensitivity of an artist's mind in response to his text counts as heavily as the deftness of his hand.

Copyright of Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society is the property of American Antiquarian Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.