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GILCREASE

JOURNAL



Winter
2000-01
Vol. 8
No. 2
c.1



J U S T LOOKING

PAGES FROM A CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

The rumors started before the bus did.

A score or so of us—the third-grade class taught by Mrs. Sayes at Alan B. Shepherd School in Bourbonnais, Illinois—had taken our seats in one of the school district's big, yellow, shambling buses for a field trip. *We were going to an art gallery.*

That was perhaps the first time I had heard those two words put together in that way. At that point in my life, "art" was merely something we students did quite often in Mrs. Sayes' class. It was an activity that involved crayons and construction paper, lumps of muddy brown clay, big squeeze bottles of tempera paint, blunt-tipped scissors that at best chewed paper into pieces, and pots of white glue some of the more adventurous students used as emergency rations.

I think now that Mrs. Sayes' affinity for art in the classroom was more mercenary. Assigning her charges to spend a block of time drawing pictures or pasting together masks or turning shoe boxes into sculpture was a way for her to assure herself extra periods of rest to offset the labor of molding young minds. Thirty

JAMES
D. WATTS
J.R.

FACING AND
PAGE ONE:

Art Critic

NORMAN ROCKWELL,
Collection of The Norman
Rockwell Museum at
Stockbridge

minutes of spelling would be followed by thirty minutes of “art”; the students who finished assignments in class early got to take up their crayons first while the rest struggled through problems in long division. And Mrs. Sayes would sit silent behind her desk, or wander aimlessly among us, pausing only to say “That’s nice,” when a student displayed a finished handiwork, or to comment, “Well, Ronnie, you would have had enough glue to do this if you hadn’t eaten it all.”

It wasn’t that I did not know what real art was. I did—well, after a fashion. I had seen illustrations in books, pictures displayed over the living room

sofas in people’s homes. But all those images I took at face value, so to speak. Those pictures

were simply there, spontaneously generated upon those pages, on those walls.

The reason? Art, in my experience, was simply a thing done to fill in the blank spaces during the school day, a pastime, a frivolity. The idea that there were grown-up people willing to devote large amounts of time and effort to such an activity as drawing pictures, and that there could be a building filled by the products of said activity, wasn’t just peculiar—it was beyond comprehension.

So, as I took my seat on that bus that gray spring day, I had no idea what awaited me at our destination. Until, that is, the boy sitting directly in front of me turned around and spoke.

“I heard there’s gonna be dirty pictures at this place,” he said.

I don’t remember his name, but I remember his face: dark, bright eyes; a wide, devilish grin that revealed a couple of missing teeth; a pointy chin that he hooked, Kilroy-fashion, over the back of his bus seat. Someone’s brother, he continued, had gone to this place the day before, and had come back with all sorts of stories about what he had seen there.

“On the top floor, they got pictures of people with no clothes on,” he said, his voice husky and urgent.

Mrs. Sayes called out for everyone to sit properly in their seats, and the boy twisted out of sight. The doors wheezed shut, the engine rumbled to life, the bus lurched forward out of the school’s parking lot, and I felt what can only be described as mortal terror. I might as well have been on a bus headed straight for the gates of hell.

“ON THE TOP FLOOR, THEY GOT
PICTURES OF PEOPLE WITH NO
CLOTHES ON,” *he said, his voice
husky and urgent.*

Why? Well, I was the preacher’s kid. And preachers’ kids weren’t supposed to go to places where they would knowingly encounter images of naked people. I had heard my father say many times in the course of his sermons, “Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil.”

But that, it seemed, was exactly what I was doing.

So I started thinking of all sorts of cunning plans to get out of this predicament. Maybe I could jump off the bus while it was moving, hitting the ground with a dramatic shoulder roll like the private detectives on TV always did when they were being taken some place against

Norman Rockwell working on *Art Critic* (page 4). *Art Critic* appeared on the cover of *Saturday Evening Post* on April 16, 1955. Rockwell (1894-1978) is probably America’s best known illustrator. An astute observer, he is known for wry, good-natured, and affectionately realistic depictions of daily happenings. His art is also the subject of critical discussion. Excluded from the canon of “high art” during his career, his work later found expanded appreciation among those who saw it within the broader sphere of American genre painting.



their will. No, I would be stopped before I got to the doors, and besides, with my luck I'd end up breaking all sorts of bones, which I had heard was a painful experience. How about claiming to have come down suddenly with some terrible illness that would require me to be taken home immediately? No, they'd want proof—and that would mean throwing up, right there on the bus. Not a pleasant thought. I could fake a faint, collapse in front of the place in a swoon.

Unfortunately, it was a very brief bus ride.

Before I could devise a foolproof method to avoid the art gallery, we were there.

Once we were out of the bus and on the sidewalk in front of the

plain, battleship-gray, almost innocent looking three-story building that was our destination, Mrs. Sayes arranged us in a line—boy-girl, boy-girl, the required configuration to avoid the sort of mischief generated whenever two or more eight-year-old males congregated. She then informed us that the art gallery we were to visit that day was affiliated with the local college, and that all the things we would see had been made by students there. Mrs. Sayes added that our class was one of several from the school, which housed elementary and junior high students, that would be touring the place today, so we were to be on our best behavior once we were inside the gallery, to show everyone that we were the finest class in the school. And we all knew what that meant: keep quiet, keep in line, keep your hands to yourself, and keep moving.

In other words, once again I was trapped. Any disruption would bring shame and dishonor upon the whole class, probably result in our never going on a field trip again, and I would not hear the end of it.

So I took my place in line and, sick to my soul with the dread about having to confess to my father my moral failure, followed the class into the art gallery.

I was afraid to look at anything directly; I think I spent the entire time on the first two floors looking at paintings out of the corner of my eye. There were paintings everywhere, big and small, hanging up and leaning against the wall. One table held an array of clay busts in various stages of completion. The cramped gallery was noisy with the sound of dozens of sensibly shod students tramping on hardwood floors.

Then we started up the stairs toward the third floor. Another class of older students—maybe fifth- or sixth-graders—was coming down the stairs, laughing and talking as if they were having the time of their lives. I couldn't resist. I had to know. "What's up there?" I asked in a stage whisper.

*Another class of older students . . .
was coming down the stairs . "WHAT'S UP
THERE?" I ASKED IN A STAGE WHISPER.*

A boy stopped, turned to look down at my anxious face. He gave me a crooked grin. "You'll find out!" he said.

Oh no, I thought. It's got to be really bad if they won't even tell me what it is. Well, if I have to look at it, I might as well get it over with.

So I squared my shoulders, took a deep breath, walked up the last few steps to the third-floor landing, made the left turn into the room—

And found myself literally surrounded by pictures depicting the crucifixion of Christ. Canvases taller than I was, wider than my arms could reach, their roughly applied oil paint glistening in the room's light. The paintings showed the image of the battered body from many perspectives, from a portrait of the thorn-crowned head to a vista that showed the two other crosses and the mourning, wailing people on the ground in front of them.

I stood transfixed, so that my classmates ended up walking around and leaving me behind, so that Mrs. Sayes had to track me down to herd me back onto the bus. It wasn't because the "dirty pictures" turned out to be religious images that so affected me. I learned a more elemental lesson that day.

Never believe what someone tells you about a work of art.

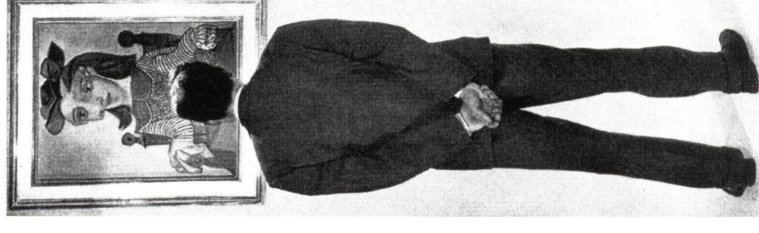
So, naturally, I became an art critic.

At least, it might seem to be the logical progression that something about that moment thirty-odd years ago triggered in me the desire to spend my days writing down my opinions about things I had seen. But in truth, there was nothing particularly natural about how I came to be in this profession, nor do I truly consider myself a critic (although I use the term to describe myself as a matter of convenience).

The majority of the people these days who share their opinions about works of art, movies, theater, music, dance, what have you, are people who have in one way or another immersed themselves in the discipline they write about. They were music professors or ballet dancers or art historians or jazz musicians or rock-and-roll fanatics before they were journalists. Then there are some—an increasingly rare breed, it would seem—who had the mantle of critic placed upon them because they happened to be in a certain spot at a certain time.

That is what happened to me. I was working for a company that published the program magazines for the local performing arts groups when I learned that one of the city's newspapers was looking for someone to cover those same groups. The job was primarily that of reporting—I would interview the artists, preview the shows and exhibitions, investigate financial situations when necessary, and so on. The burden of reviews was the responsibility of other writers, experts in music, opera, art, and dance.

This division of labor did not last long; those other writers went on to other things, and their tasks became my tasks. That's just the way newspapers usually



work. Within five years my job had evolved to include reporting on and reviewing practically every sort of music, as well as dance, opera, visual arts, theater, even the occasional film.

When that paper ceased to be, I was hired by the city's remaining daily to do—well, what I had been doing: writing about everything cultural except yogurt.

All this is to answer a question that most critics get asked, usually by the subject of a less-than-favorable review: Who made this particular person a ruler and a judge over the arts? What gives one certain person the right to assess the creative work of another?

Simple: the publication that employs said critic. A newspaper or a magazine has the right to assign any of its employees to do whatever task it deems necessary to fulfill its mission of informing the public. Some are assigned to write about local and national politics, some cover the police beat, others football, still others business. And some write about what is happening in the arts.

This is the main reason I do not think of myself as a critic. To my thinking, a critic is someone who has devoted his or her career to the assessment of a particular art form, who has made it the work of a lifetime to know as much as possible about a given subject—Chinese pottery, 20th-century painting, Baroque music, classical ballet.

On the other hand, I am a reporter. Essentially, what I do is no different from what the police reporter or the sports reporter or the business reporter does. Each has been assigned one aspect of city life to observe, and each is required to pass on those observations in the form of news stories—and in my case, reviews. In order to do this task properly, I need to educate myself as much as possible about the subjects about which I am to write—just like a police reporter spending countless hours following law officers about their business, or a political reporter ferreting out all the behind-the-scenes machinations of city hall.

Fortunately, I have always been interested in the subjects I cover. I enjoy classical music, although my personal tastes aren't limited to it; I can't dance, but I appreciate those who do; I can spend hours in a museum, whether exploring every individual gallery or standing spellbound before favorite images like

Alexandre Hogue's *Crucified Land*. But such an attitude is hardly a necessity in the newspaper business. I once worked with a fellow whose least favorite activity in the world was going to the movies. He disliked the whole process—the crowds, the sticky floors, the likelihood of wasting good money and a couple of hours on the visual equivalent of trash. Naturally, he spent two years as the paper's film critic.

Still, the key thing about a review is that it provides information. It is a form of reporting, albeit one that tempers a recitation of facts with some informed, intelligent opinion. That's the ideal, anyway.

The odd thing is, there doesn't seem to be a great many people who think of critical reviews in that way—and I include in that group some of the people who write them. I'm sure this can be attributed, in large part, to the way critics have been portrayed in films like *Laura* and *All About Eve*, and all manner of television programs. Just the title "critic" brings to mind a fellow in dapper dress, his face set in an expression somewhere between haughty and sneering, always ready with some acid-drenched witticism to show his intellectual superiority and put the rest of the dull, tacky little world in its place. To be a critic is to be a destroyer of everything except the reputation of the critic.

And that misses the point of art criticism entirely. The critic is not the antagonist of the artist—not intentionally, anyway. Rather, the critic is an integral part of the creative process. Harold Rosenberg, in his 1975 book *Art on the Edge*, puts it this way: "The art critic is the collaborator of the artist in developing the culture of visual works as a resource of human sensibility. His basic function is to extend the artist's act into the realms of meaningful discourse."

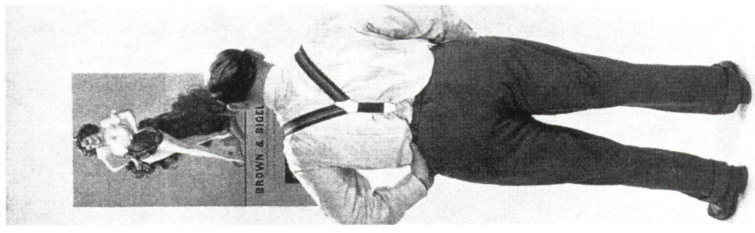
An artist creates—a painting, a sculpture, a performance, a poem. If the artist has ambition and integrity beyond crafting an object to sell, then there depths of meaning to this creation in addition to the beauty and complexity of its surface, qualities that do more than dazzle the eye of the viewer, qualities that even the artist cannot adequately explain or even recognize.

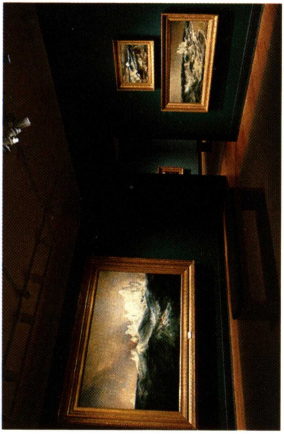
A critic views this particular work, then tries to put the experience into words. Not just what the piece looked like, but what it felt like. An individual work of art may outrage or amuse, it may bore or enrapture, it may stir your soul or leave you cold. It's up to the critic to explain why the piece of art had this effect upon him, and in doing so, to give the people who read his review a starting point for their own experiences with that particular work.

Two years ago, Gilcrease Museum hosted the exhibit *Thomas Moran*, the first retrospective of this artist's work since his death some seventy years earlier. It was on every level an overwhelming event. Moran worked on an epic scale—not just in the size of his finished, monumental paintings like *Spectres from the North* or the three works that made up the never-before-seen-together triptych of *Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone*, *Chasm of the Colorado*, and *Mountain of the*

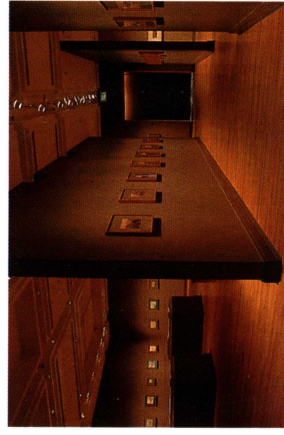
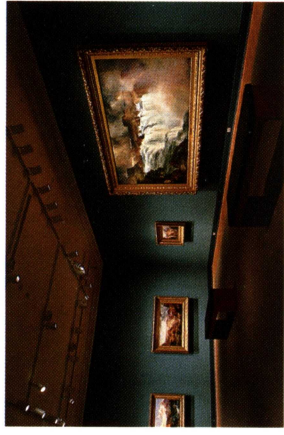
WHAT GIVES ONE CERTAIN
PERSON THE RIGHT TO ASSESS
THE CREATIVE WORK OF
ANOTHER?

S I M P L E :
THE PUBLICATION
THAT EMPLOYS SAID CRITIC.





The *Thomas Moran* exhibition occupied several linked galleries during its showing at Gilcrease Museum in 1998. Below, the showstopper trio of *Chasm of the Colorado*, *Mountain of the Holy Cross*, and *Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone*.



Holy Cross, but also in the number of preparatory and field sketches, watercolors, and prints he produced. The main show, organized by the National Gallery of Art, was huge; when it came to Gilcrease, where it was augmented by items from the museum's own collection, it was gargantuan.

I had seen the show when it debuted at the National Gallery in Washington, D.C. There, it was impressive. But in Tulsa, it was breathtaking. The main reason was the way in which the paintings were displayed. The “Western triptych” was perhaps the biggest selling point of the show; the three paintings occupied a single wall in one room, about midway through the exhibition. As patrons walked through other galleries they got teasing glimpses at the triptych room,



little hints of what was to come in the rooms of watercolor sketches that preceded it. This made the moment of coming into the triptych gallery and seeing those paintings which seemed to stretch for miles all the more powerful.

At least, that's what I thought. Among the phone calls I received after my review of the Moran exhibition was one from a lady who politely but firmly told me I was crazy. For her, the exhibit was exhausting. She had had to wander through room after room of things

that didn't interest her to see the big paintings, which did. And even then, they didn't seem as big as they had been advertised to be. I got a chuckle out of that conversation—after I had thanked her for calling and hung up the phone, of course. But it also reminded me that a review is not the last word on a work of art, no matter how definitively a critic may make his case. A review is the *first* word in the ongoing discussion about the ways we communicate with each other through art.

Which brings me back to that first visit to an art gallery long ago—a failure-to-communicate situation if ever there was one.

All I knew at the outset was that I was going to a kind of a place I had never seen before. I then received some unsolicited information about what I would discover at this place.

Now, a less gullible child might have concluded that the presence of “dirty pictures of people with no clothes on” at the gallery was a rumor. The art on display was by local college students and their school was affiliated with the fairly conservative Nazarene church. Hardly a group that would push salacious material to grade-schoolers.

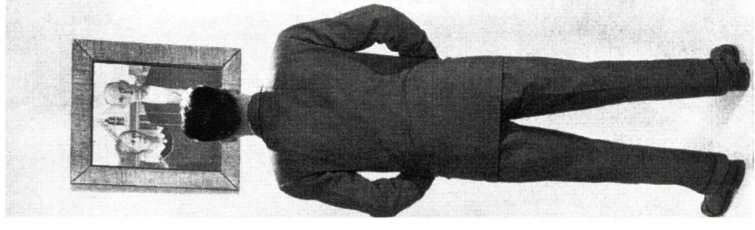
It's possible that the brother of whoever told the boy in the seat in front of me about the dirty pictures on the top floor was even more gullible—or less religiously trained—than I was, and really believed that images of Jesus on the cross, clad in a white loincloth, were just pictures of naked people. I can't decide if I consider this to be very sad, or very strange.

Another—and more likely—possibility is that whoever started the tale about what was on the third floor of the gallery did so to play a joke on his younger brother and anyone else he might tell. Siblings do that sort of thing all the time—get the little brother all worked up about something, then laugh at the disappointment or embarrassment that follows.

This made the moment of coming into the triptych gallery and seeing those paintings which seemed to stretch for miles all the more powerful.

.....

AT LEAST, THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT.



Whatever the case, in the end we were told a story. Someone put into words the effect a work of art had upon him, and shared those words with others in an attempt to influence their thinking about the objects he had seen. In other words, it was a review. Never mind the fact that this review in no way corresponded to my reaction once I saw the works for myself. It was as legitimate an opinion of the show as anything that might have appeared in the local newspaper.

And that is why the question one should put to a critic or reviewer is not, "What gives you the right to criticize people's work?", but rather, "How seriously do you take the responsibilities of being a critic?"

With any right comes responsibilities, and that is especially true of someone writing about the creative work of others. It gets back to the popular image of the snooty, above-it-all critic, who lives only to find fault and to trumpet it to the world. Certainly there are such people in the world—I've met a few. And I cannot deny that reading—and writing—a scathing review can be extremely entertaining, with insult piled on invective added to ridicule topped off by questions of the legitimacy of the subject's parentage.

But, honestly, what's the good of such an attitude, for reviewer or reviewee? Once I made the effort to close down a particular show that I thought irredeemable by writing the most disparaging review I could muster. Two days after it was published, the producers extended the show's run by two weeks in order to handle the massive demand for tickets. Reviews born of malice rarely have the intended effect. And further, they may well be unintentionally dated.

Images from *Shared Visions: Native American Painters and Sculptors in the Twentieth Century*, organized by Rennard Strickland and Margaret Archuleta. The exhibit premiered at The Heard Museum, Phoenix, Arizona, in 1991 and traveled to Gilcrease Museum. Below: *Buffalo Dance* by Tonita Peña (1895-1949) and *Eagle Dance* by Woodrow Wilson Crumbo (1912-1989). Collection of The Heard Museum.



Today's acid wit can quickly become tomorrow's laughingstock. Just check the humor section of a local bookstore: you'll find many books filled with the misguided missives of long-forgotten critics belittling what we now consider the classics of literature, film, and art.

But the more important reason a critic should avoid gratuitous negativity is that it undermines the first responsibility of the job: providing information. Every critic has an audience, and it is to serve the needs of that audience—to help them understand what is going on in this portion of their world—that the critic writes. When a critic decides to attack an artist or a work simply because he has the power and position to do so, when the goal of a review is to denigrate and destroy, then the audience for which the critic writes is reduced to two people: the object of the scorn, and the self-amused critic. It may be a hoot to read, but remember this: it is a lie.

And that's another responsibility of the critic: to be truthful. I do not mean "objective." There can be no such thing as an "objective" review, because a review is one person's reactions to and opinions about a work of art or entertainment. However, a review still needs to tell the truth.

The way I see it, a review doesn't describe something as being good or bad. It tells its readers something about whether an art exhibit, a book, a theater piece, a film has been successful in achieving its goals. That requires of the critic a knowledge of the artist's intentions, of the medium in which the artist works, a standard of excellence against which this work can be compared, and a clear-eyed, unprejudiced examination of the work being presented.

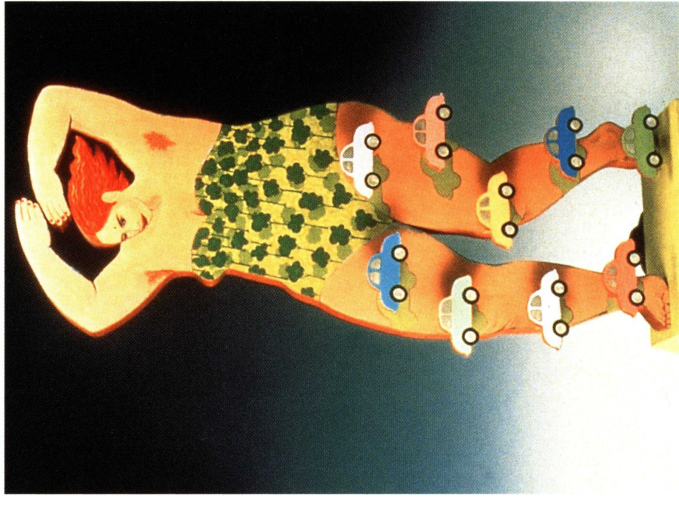
Now, the artist's goals may be to appeal to as low a common denominator as possible, to shock and disturb for no reason other than the doing. The person who creates such work is making a statement, a challenge: "Look what I can do!" or maybe, "Take this!"

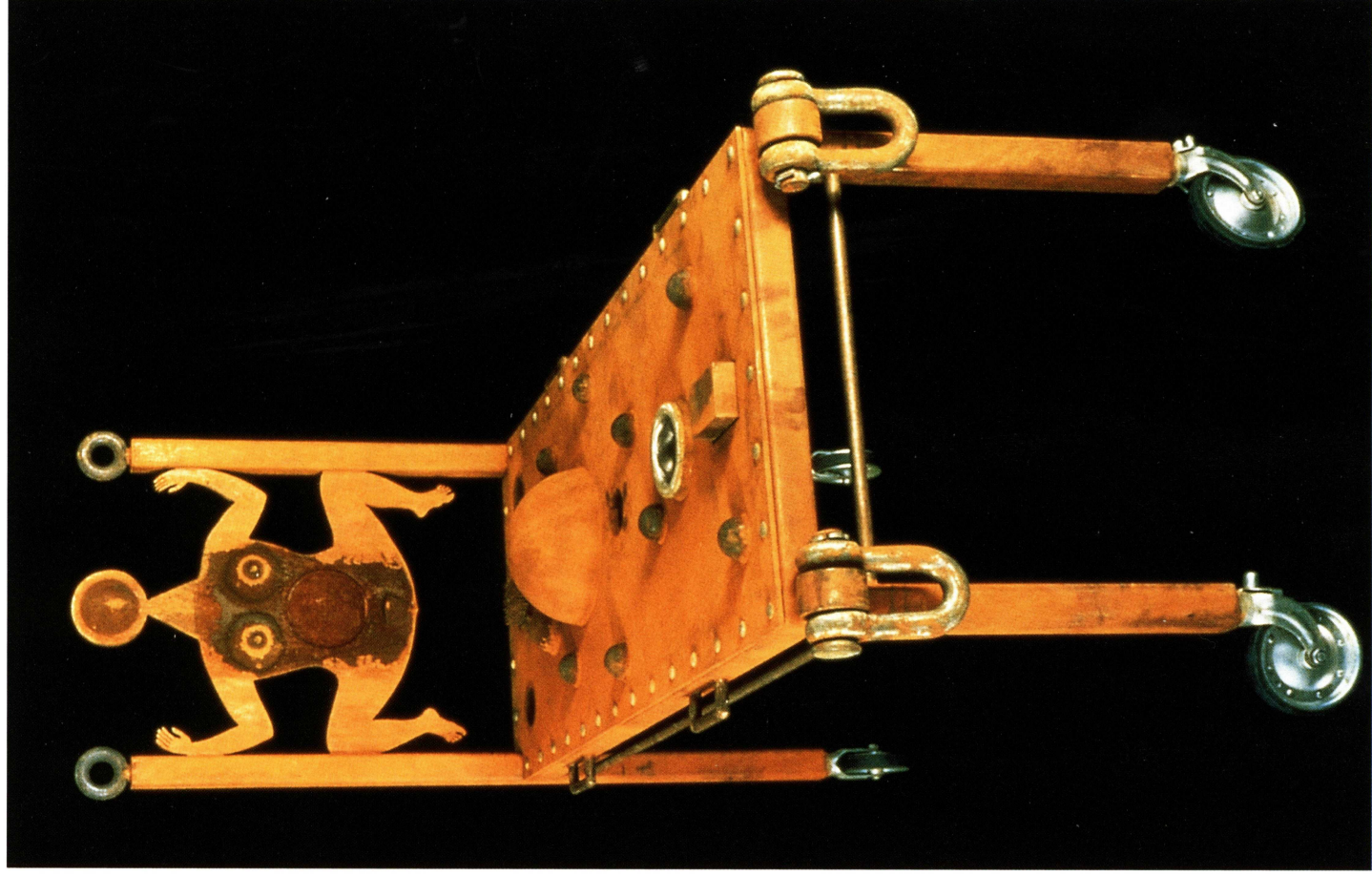
Real art makes no statements. Real art only asks questions.

And out of questions come stories.

For example, in 1992 Gilcrease Museum presented the exhibit *Shared Visions: Native American Painters and Sculptors of the 20th Century*. The exhibit traced the evolution of American Indian fine art, from its origins in the flat ledger-style drawings to the way modern-day artists address questions about native identity and culture in works far removed from the so-called "traditional" concepts of what constitutes Indian art.

Also shown in *Shared Visions: Native American Painters and Sculptors in the Twentieth Century*: *Ozone Madonna* by Bob Haozous (b. 1943). Collection of The Heard Museum.





One of the more unforgettable pieces in this large exhibit was a metal sculpture by Bob Haozous, titled *The Abortionist's Bed*. It was a fearsome creation, a nightmare on wheels, with sharply toothed gears and oddly placed bumps and lumps, that would make it impossible to lie upon.

The museum officials were concerned at how this work would be received by local audiences, especially in light of controversies that had arisen around some exhibits and activities funded in part by the National Endowment for the Arts that had dealt with volatile subjects in deliberately confrontational ways.

Yet *The Abortionist's Bed* caused no such stir, in large part because of the questions the piece proposed, and the stories one could create in answer to those questions. For me, the main question about Haozous's sculpture was the title: what was meant by referring to this contraption as "The Abortionist's Bed"? The story that I came up with was that this was not the bed the title character used in the course of his duties: this was the bed upon which he had to sleep every night, full of all the painful reminders of his chosen profession.

Also, this piece was part of a larger, more encompassing story—the story told by the exhibit itself about how American Indian art has become a way of presenting the world that is as profound and important as any other. The exhibit began with images that some might consider stereotypical of Indian art. But as you walked through the exhibit, you literally watched ideas about art change, as artists left behind the preconceived notions about what makes up Indian art in order to create art that happened to be made by American Indians. As disturbing as *The Abortionist's Bed* was, it made sense within that context.

That was what I tried to show in my review of *Shared Visions*. It is likely not everyone who read that review agreed with the ideas I presented, and that's fine. To be honest, I don't write reviews expecting everyone to concur with what I say, even though it's nice when that happens.

The goal of any review, any story we tell,
is to get the person to read it to the end,
then put down the paper, go out into the world,
and see for themselves what is there to discover.

Art and the Critic

BY KEN BUSBY AND ANNE MORAND



October Sport, Arthur F. Tait, 0126.2250

“His sketchbook is filled with wood and water life. . . . His dogs and quail and grouse have become a kind of necessity to every well-ordered room.”

COSMOPOLITAN ART JOURNAL, 1858-59

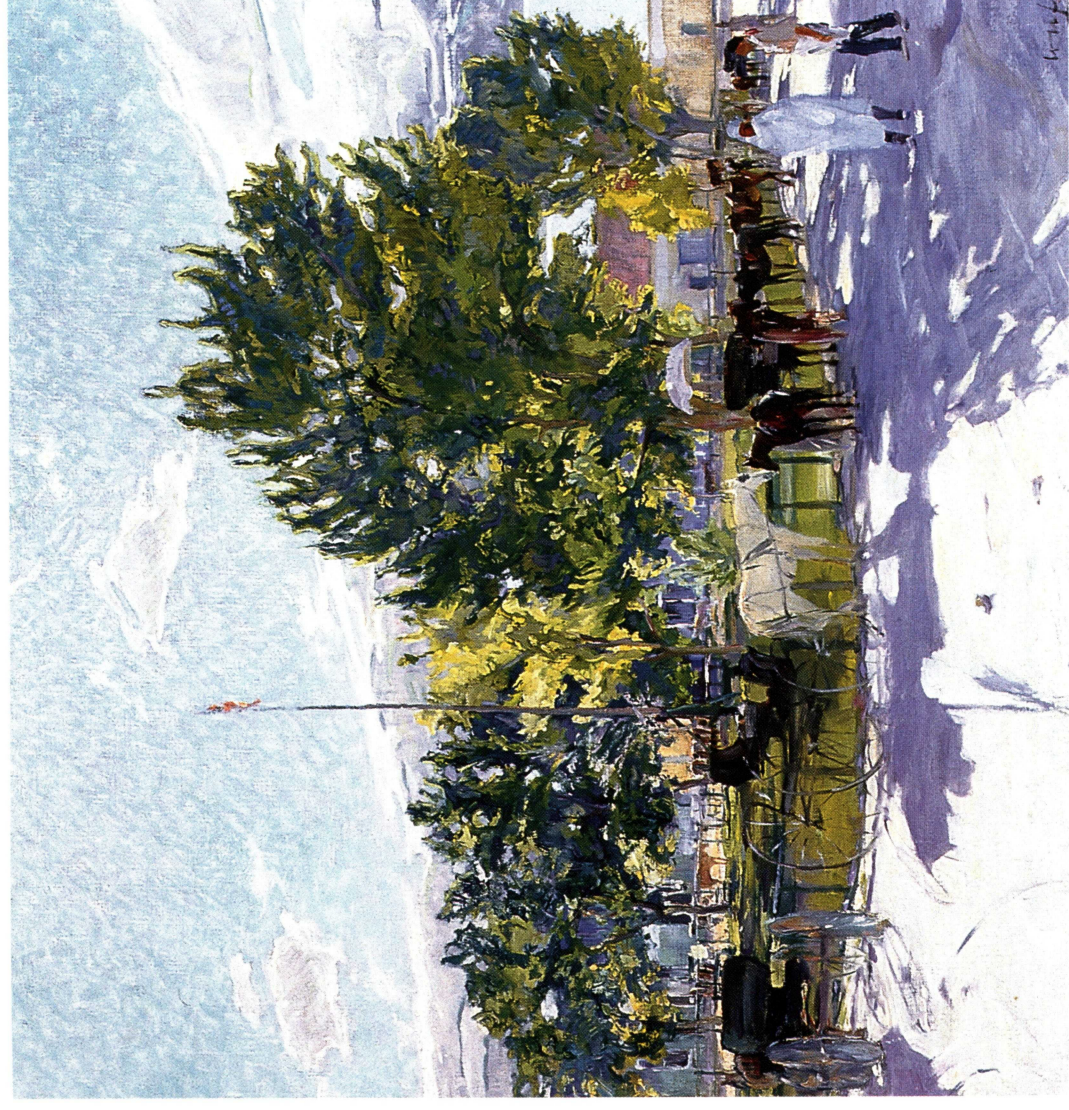
Formal art criticism in America is a youthful art, and still evolving. Its history, as David B. Dearinger writes, “is directly linked to the history of annual art exhibitions in this country. It is, of course, also linked to . . . the rise in importance of journalism and the press.”

Art exhibitions supplied a public and predictable showcase for art; newspapers and periodicals supplied a readership and the instrument of the printed page for the critic. At its onset, American art criticism tended to reflect the preferences of individuals or to be purely descriptive. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, critics writing (often anonymously) for the illustrated weeklies critiqued paintings within the context of the European-derived subject categories: from highest to lowest, historical and religious pictures, historical portraits, historical landscapes, common portraits, common landscapes, genre scenes (picturesque images of everyday life), and still lifes. But in the late nineteenth century, Margaret Conrads writes, critics began to try to define a national art. “The question of what did or should constitute American art formed an umbrella over the debate about the purpose of art. . . . Tightly tied to all these debates was the discussion of what was American art’s appropriate relationship to that of Europe.” With the thundering arrival of modern art in the twentieth century, the critical debate had to absorb the conflict between new and old styles, real and ideal, representational and abstract. Today, critical reactions to art, positive or negative, exist within the complex dynamics of a quickly changing society with many subcultures, deluged by a flood of imagery in many media, and may respond to a number of factors, such as the blurring of lines between media and between artistic objectives, and between art and artist in the day of performance art and media personalities, as well as art’s aesthetic worth.

Works that receive critical acclaim may be ignored by the public. Film is a good example, where festival winners and film critics’ pets may or may not be box office draws. The reverse can also be true. And opinion, both public and

critical, shifts radically over time. In general, American paintings in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were thought by critics to be inferior to their better known and accepted European counterparts. The focus of critical argument also evolves: the question of whether art should be representational or abstract, for example, is no longer a subject of critical debate in most circles.

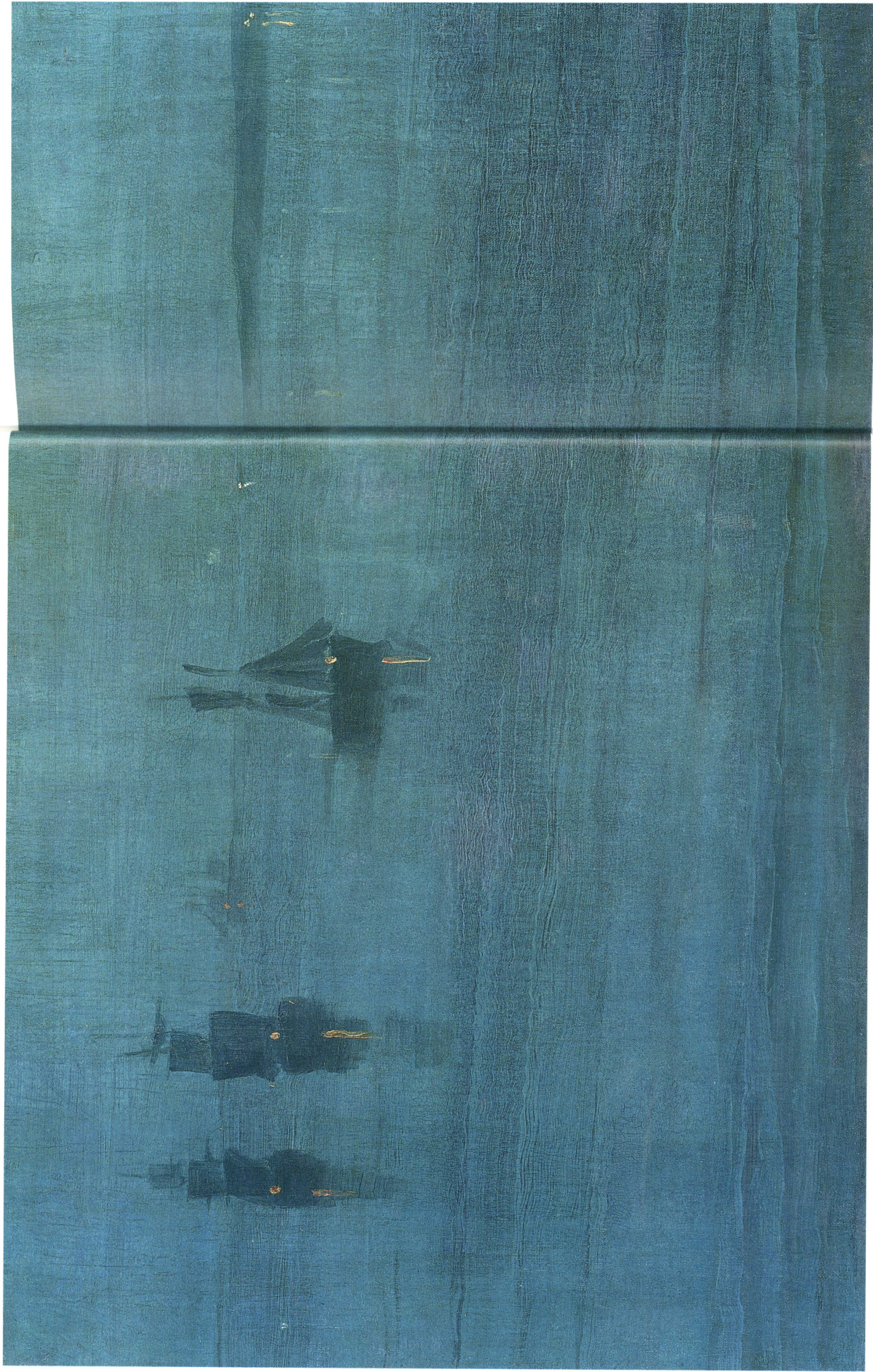
In this volatile world, art historians have given us a vocabulary to describe the differences in style between one school of art and another, enabling us to gain a first level of understanding by grouping and identifying various works of art. Through their efforts we can differentiate between a Dutch landscape and a Chinese landscape; or a Greek figure and a nineteenth-century American portrait. Art criticism takes us a step further, opening the debate about whether an artwork sufficiently meets the selected criteria to be adjudged “good,” whether it has relevant merit and adds to our quality of life.



EL PALACIO, 1916

Taos Plaza, Walter Ufer, 0137.550

“In his western scenes he is vividly and picturesquely American, with the spirit of the Aborigines. He conveys to us an enjoyment of the sunlight and the air and the freedom. . . .”



Russian writer and social reformer Leo Tolstoy wrote in *What is Art?* that “great works of art are only great because they are accessible and comprehensible to everyone.” Tolstoy’s comment applies to standards for the time in which he was living. Whether an artwork has importance or relevance at another time is the arena for art historians. The art critic must consider the significance of the artwork to contemporary society, at the time when the artwork is created.

Criticism is the analysis and judgment of works of art. Criticism also tries to interpret and evaluate and examine the principles by which art may be understood. It goes well beyond the general reactions of “I like it” or “I don’t like it” (because of its subject matter, color, or associations, for example). Various writ-

ers have formulated the criteria for judging art in numerous ways over time. Tolstoy, for example, believed that only three factors need to be considered—individuality, clarity, and sincerity. “All works of art take rank of merit according to the degree in which they fulfill [these] conditions. Thus is art divided from that which is not art, and thus is the quality of art as art decided.”

Political commentary has often been cloaked within art, as have religious passions. Many renderings of The Last Supper have upset or at the very least brought into question the loyalties of the artist to the Catholic Church. Artists have been labeled heretics for casting the figure of Christ in less than “holy” settings. This was especially true in Europe in the seventeenth century during the scientific revolution that occurred alongside the Baroque period in art and literature.

British essayist and critic Walter Pater characterized art as something that “comes to you proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass.” Art criticism helps define that quality and it has become an

important discipline for giving both validation and value to art. Indeed, an exhibition curated by the New York Academy of Design is focusing on criticism of important American artworks created between 1826 and 1925. Gilcrease Museum will host this exhibition from February 2 to April 1, 2001. In the pages that follow, we take a look at some of the important American artists from the Gilcrease collection and how their art was seen by critics of their time.

Nocturne, The Solent,
James McNeill Whistler,
0176.1185

“I say I can’t thank you too much for the name ‘Nocturne’ as a title for my moonlights! You have no idea what an irritation it proves to the critics and consequent pleasure to me—besides it is really so charming and does so poetically say all that I want to say and no more than I wish!”

WHISTLER WRITING TO
FREDERICK LEYLAND, 1872

David B. Dearing, editor, *Rave Reviews: American Art and Its Critics, 1826-1925*, National Academy of Design, New York, 2000.

Emmet, Rosina H., "The Shinnecock Hills Art School," *The Art Exchange*, October 1893.

Gannett Center Journal, "Arts and Media," Volume 4, Number 1, Columbia University, New York, 1990.

Gombrich, E. H., *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1984.

Martin, F. David and Lee A. Jacobus, *The Humanities Through the Arts*, McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York, 1983.

Tolstoy, Leo, *What is Art?*, Macmillan Publishing Company, New York, 1989.

Von Eckardt, Wolf, *Live the Good Life: Creating a Human Community Through the Arts*, American Council for the Arts, New York, 1982.

ALBERT BIERSTADT

Known for his pristine landscapes, Bierstadt created most of his images from accounts of other travelers and his own first-hand experience.

Two reviews of his *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak*, more than thirty years apart, confirm both Bierstadt's technical ability as an artist and the critics' recognition of the sublime, hopeful quality with which the artist often imbued his subjects.

From *Harper's Weekly*, "The New Pictures," of March 26, 1864, comes the comment, "It is purely an American scene, and from the faithful and elaborate delineation of the Indian village, a form of life now rapidly disappearing from the earth, may be called a historic landscape. It is the curtailed continent with its sublime natural forms and its rude savage human life. . . . And unlike Mr. [Frederic] Church's pictures of equatorial mountain scenery of America, which from their volcanic and tropical character, however luxuriant, yet forbid hope and leave an impression of profound sadness and desolation, this work of Bierstadt's inspires the temperate cheerfulness and promise of the region it depicts and the imagination contemplates it as the possible seat of supreme civilization."

On May 31, 1895, the art critic for the *Chicago Tribune* wrote: "That he [Bierstadt], and no man, ever saw that particular scene of Indian life, matters little. Whoever saw Venus or Apollo? Did Dante ever pass through chaos? And yet, although Bierstadt never saw this landscape or witnessed this scene, the picture contains nothing which he has not seen. . . . Deny to the picture, as we assuredly must, poetic suggestive-ness, and beauty, and sentiment; yet it remains to be said that it is wondrously full of invention."



GEORGE DE FOREST
BRUSH



Mourning Her Brave,
George de Forest Brush,
0216.1189

The painting *Mourning Her Brave* is among the most powerful images in the Gilcrease collection. The expressionistic form of the female figure and her relationship to a background so severe as to be nearly abstract seem fresh and timeless. Emotion is universalized through art to encompass the bereavement of women throughout time in cultures from early Native American to today's Afghanistan or Peru. The painting appeared along with an article by Brush entitled "An Artist Among the Indians" in the May 1885 edition of *Century Magazine*.

Royal Cortissoz wrote in "The Society of American Artists," for *Harper's Weekly* in April 1895, "At the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, under [the mentor]

Gerome, he [Brush] found out the importance of good drawing. . . . It is not apparent that he ever took any short cuts. Brush drew, rather, as he was taught, in the years during which he was forming himself. Great personal draftsmanship was to come to him later. At the outset he was a faithful disciple of academic principles, and his early work emphasizes the fact. He came back to America with what I can only call a Parisian sense of form, the method which spells care and scholarship. You see it in those Indian subjects which he painted in the [eighteen] eighties."



WILLIAM MERRITT CHASE

Still Life, William Merritt
Chase, 0216.2251

Picturesque settings have been favored by artists both for their beauty and for their natural appeal among collectors. Nowhere was this more true than in the Shinnecock Hills of New York. A number of American artists enjoyed painting in this locale, including William Merritt Chase. Shinnecock Hills, with its glorious atmospheric effects, was considered by artists and critics alike to be superbly suited for *plein air* painting. Wrote one critic, "Not only are the hills the most delightful place in the world, but no greater profusion of material can be found anywhere to delight the eye of an artist." And while some found Chase's Shinnecock subjects "pedestrian," a more astute reviewer noted that "It was Chase who dared to find a subject worthy of his brushes in a modern summer cottage on a sand dune."

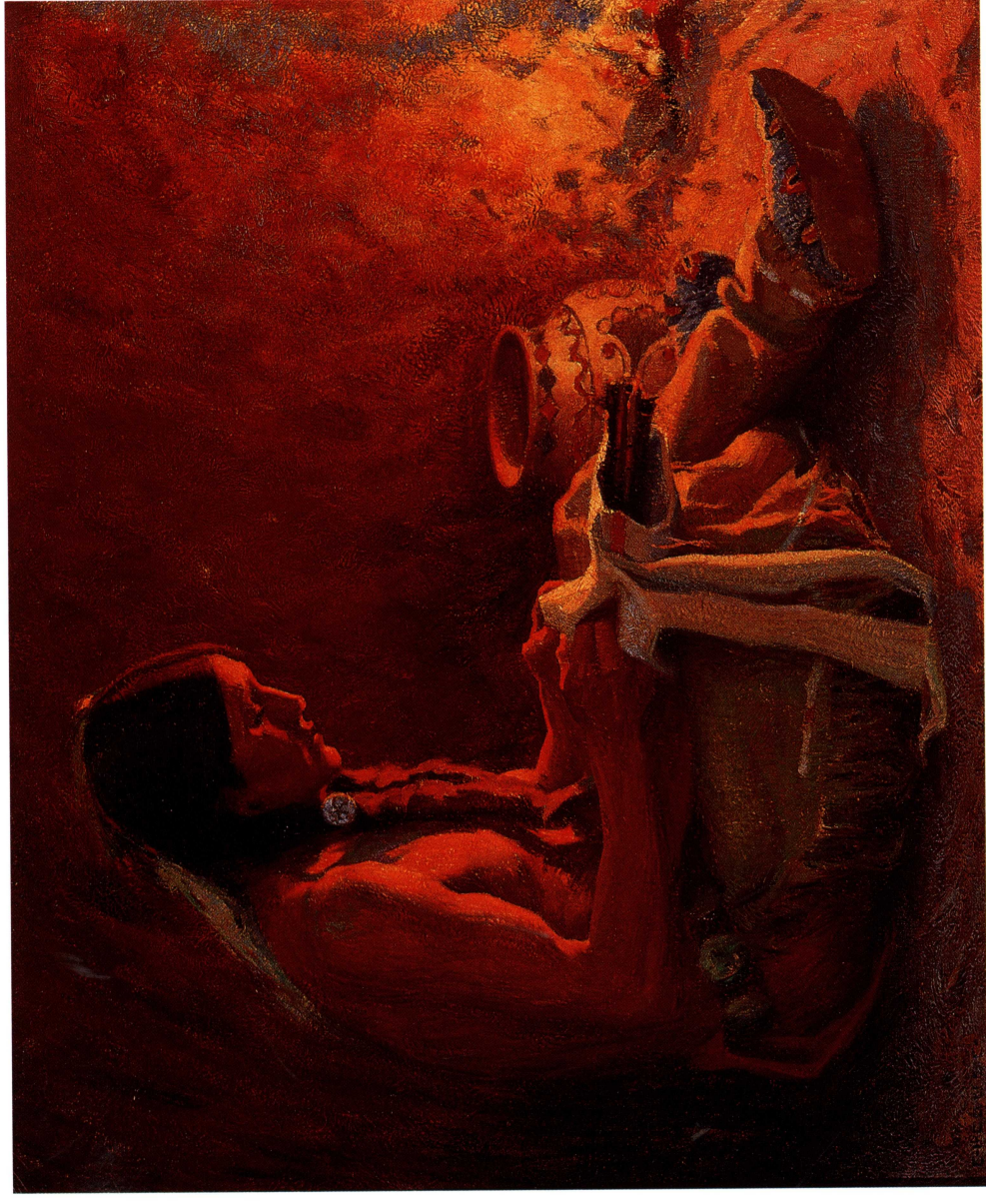
Sadakichi Hartmann commented, "My contention is that Chase has been a subject painter all his life. . . . Of course, he has always avoided telling a story directly. But he has suggested them. It is almost impossible for him to paint an interior without introducing a figure. And even his Shinnecock landscapes he peoples with members of his numerous family."



Shell Beach at Shinnecock, William Merritt Chase, 0216.2252

Chase himself said, "If one can paint a fence-rail well, it is far better than an unsuccessful attempt at the most sublime scenery, for it is not what one does, but the way it is done." Chase knew what he was doing. In an article entitled "Chase's Long Island Studio" from the January 19, 1896 edition of *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, we read, "The sensation of changing light and moving air, the vibrating depth of the pale azure skies, the sheen of the beach grasses and the quiet green grays of the moss covered sand dunes are given with surprising fidelity and exquisite gradation while the unerring instinct of the colorist never fails to rightly place the figures whose costumes give the needed note of vivid contrasting color or of brilliant opalescent white. The pictorial possibilities hidden under the veils of haze and mist which so often envelope the landscape along the south shore have tempted the brushes of a generation of painters. Of these none has been more fortunate than Mr. Chase in rendering the tones of the silvery summer skies or the delicate ever changing hues of the rolling sand hills."

Chase received almost universal praise for his fresh approach to light. "Of the landscapes," Orson Lowell wrote in an article for *Brush and Pencil* in May 1898, "Mr. Chase's naturally demand attention first—really, what would an exhibition be without him!—he is all around us with sketches of almost everything, all done in his fine, enthusiastic, breezy way. . . . These things by Mr. Chase of sea and sky and sandy shore are like a breath of salt-sea air itself—he has somehow managed to bring a bit of even that back to us, as he would a flower."



E. IRVING COUSE

The Arrow Maker, E. Irving Couse, 0137.2193

Critical acclaim can come in a variety of forms, both in the commentary of critics and in the awarding of prizes. Enger Irving Couse came to the American Southwest in 1902 from New York. By the time he arrived, he was already receiving critical acclaim for his work. He joined such luminaries as Joseph Henry Sharp and Ernest Blumenschein in creating the Taos (New Mexico) Society of Artists. The same year he came to Taos, 1902, Couse received the First Hallgarten Prize from the National Academy of Design for "best oil painted in the United States by an American citizen under 35." Couse's scrapbooks contain a number of unidentified news clippings about him, including a 1907 comment, "Couse is the man who is just now all the rage in New York." In the *New York Sun* of May 18, 1913, a writer noted, "No one ever tried to paint the Indian in Couse's way before. No one has ever taken him quite so seriously from a purely artistic standpoint."



Florida River Scene,
Martin J. Heade,
0215.2137

MARTIN JOHNSON HEADE

Heade, like his contemporary Frederic Church, became known for his landscapes. Among his personal papers we find several unidentified reviews and commentaries: "The studio of Church. . . is now occupied by M. J. Heade. . . where his inimitable sunsets and flower pieces were so justly admired. Mr. Heade is remarkable for the versatility of his talents. If we look at one of his meadow scenes over which hang the many-colored clouds of sunset; at his flower pieces and clusters of apple-blossoms; or turn from these to his groups of hummingbirds, we recognize in each the hand of a master. . . Mr. Heade is always happy in his clouds and water and produces the most surprising effects where they are prominent. . . Benjamin S. Nathan, of West Twenty-third Street, near Fifth Avenue, last week purchased of Mr. Knoedler, one of the best paintings of flowers that have been produced in this country. It is the work of Heade, an American artist who promises to become a rival of the great Robie."

Heade did a fair amount of travel to exotic locations throughout North America. *The Book of the Artists*, 1867, reported that "[Heade] has become identified with tropical landscapes, and especially succeeds in representing marshlands, with hay-ricks and the peculiar atmospheric effects thereof. . . . As an accurate and graceful illustrator of natural history, Heade attained a special reputation; his delineation of birds and flowers is remarkable for the most faithful drawing and exquisite color. . . . He has lately turned his attention to landscape art with great success. . . . None of our painters has a more refined sense of beauty, or a more delicate feeling of color. Mr. Heade embodied the very soul of vernal bloom and tenderness in two or three modest, lovely pictures of "Apple Blossoms"; we could not have believed so simple and common an object could be made so suggestive; but they give the very key-note to the season."

One reviewer called *Sunset on the St. John's River* (left, now entitled *Florida River Scene*) "a fine expression of tropical landscape; the lurid afterglow upon the sky above the horizon tells of the quiet sunset, the reflection in the river. . . and the weird, somber aspect of the country on either side, the tufted heads of numerous palmetto trees, painted against the dusky evening sky, all evidence of a skillful hand."

Commentaries came from Europe too, especially London. Two reviews from the 1873 *Art Journal* give insight into what American artists were producing as compared with their British rivals. "The landscape artists of America are rapidly coming to the front; already they are the powerful rivals of the British painters, and certainly surpass those of the continent. . . . There is now another name that we shall add to the lists of great masters [in American landscape art], that of M. J. Heade. . . .

"[Heade] has one or two small tropical scenes. In regard to the latter we have noticed a tone in them so different from that of Church's tropical pictures, that we are tempted to ask a question. Mr. Heade has made two visits to the tropics and should be about as familiar with them as Mr. Church. The pictures of the latter are exceedingly brilliant and voluptuous in color—there is a certain suggestion of lassitude in their atmosphere, but nothing which can be called voluptuous—and as to brilliancy, their pearl-grey color forbids any use of the word. Mr. Heade has sacrificed brilliance to something. Other pictures show that he can be brilliant if he likes, and his tropical pictures show a direct intention of avoiding brilliancy. The logical conclusion is that he has adhered to nature as she is in the tropics, instead of representing her as she might be."

Winslow Homer lived where he painted, near Prout's Neck, Maine, from the 1870s on. He also maintained a studio in the Tenth Street Building in New York, and was very much part of the American art scene, exhibiting regularly at the National Academy of Design. Homer had no formal art training, but he did train as an illustrator and created images for *Harper's Magazine* relating to the Civil War.

Watching the Breakers,
Winslow Homer,
0216.2264

According to Isham's *History of American Painting*, "It is this absorption in his subject that makes it so difficult to compare Homer with other artists. . . . [It] is as if one left pictures for reality. . . . [It] is only by making a special effort that his very great artistic merits are recognized, his draftsmanship, his composition, his color, and even when that is done, the tendency is to revert again to the indwelling spirit, the love for the strong, free life of men who fight in the open air against man, beast or the elements, the life that his great name-sake sang in the days before history. They are Homeric."

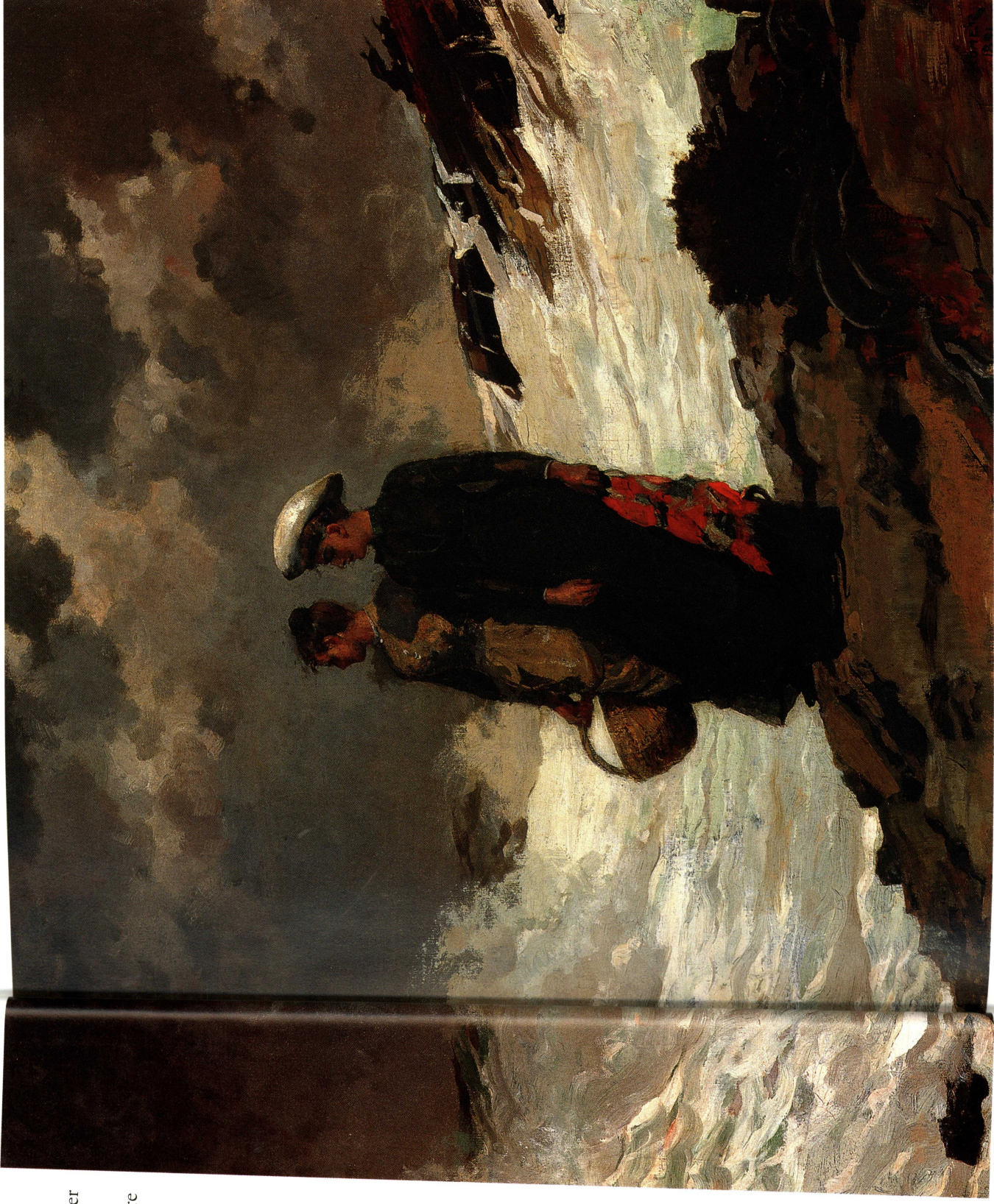
Homer had his detractors as well. An anonymous critic of the *Philadelphia Telegraph* in 1892 said Homer had been "a great painter at one period of his history, during the Civil War," but, "with the production of *Eight Bells* [had] given up all idea of pleasing the public." This critic went on to call *The Life Line* and *Undertow* "just experiments" created by one who had "gone off too far on his own line to care about others who are still lingering in the land of the Philistines, unable or unwilling to follow his hand."

We now see Homer as ahead of his time in terms of looking unblinkingly at the world. However, negative reactions such as these caused him to turn back to Prout's Neck subjects that he had been painting in watercolor for ten years. These had been small works, and now Homer focused on creating larger oil paintings to encompass the breadth of his vision.

Homer created a number of seascapes using Prout's Neck as a backdrop. One of these, *Northeaster*, painted in 1895, received two gold medals during an exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. Said a critic for the *New York Evening Post* in 1902, "The picture is instilled with the grandiose beauty of the storm. . . . Behind the great wave, which is the hero of this ocean epic, the menace of two others, the actual forms of which are lost between lowering sky and flying mist, is perceptibly felt. One turns away . . . with a heightened realization of the ocean's ceaseless war with the land. . . ."

Watching the Breakers was one of a series of distinctive paintings featuring the rocks of Prout's Neck. The two female figures were daughters of local fishermen and family friends, Ida Meserve (left) and Maud Googins. A bronze plaque at Prout's Neck proclaims:

WINSLOW HOMER, 1836-1910
WHO WITH HIS BRUSH GAVE PROUT'S NECK TO THE WORLD





The Arrival of the American Troops at the Front, John Singer Sargent, 0177.1219

JOHN SINGER SARGENT

Sargent, an American painter born in Italy in 1856, loved portraiture and landscapes. Throughout his career Sargent's portraits were often harshly criticized, and the landscapes fared no better. The critics' attitudes were summarized by one sympathetic writer who remarked, "with no painter does the pendulum of liking and disliking oscillate so violently about a fixed center of respect for his power."

Though critics admired Sargent for his astonishing skill, they often disparaged the mass appeal of his paintings. The unflattering criticism seems to have had no effect whatsoever on Sargent's technique or subject matter. His style was intimate, personal, and captured a fleeting mood.

One body of Sargent's work that drew positive reaction was a group of military paintings he created during the first World War. Sargent was in Austria when war broke out. Local authorities impounded his paintings, but Sargent continued to paint with what materials they had left him. Finally, in December of 1917, Sargent managed to leave Austria for Great Britain.

In May 1918, British Prime Minister Lloyd George formally requested that Sargent travel to the front as an official war artist. His assignment was to paint a large canvas memorializing the joint efforts of English and American troops. In June Sargent set out for the western front with his friend, the artist and teacher Henry Tonks, who had volunteered for a similar assignment. According to Tonks, "Sargent entered completely into the spirit of his surroundings. I don't think he ever grasped much about the military campaign in actual being. . . .

Things which seemed the commonplaces of war surprised him as when he said to General Fielding one Sunday when the Band was playing, 'I suppose there is no fighting on Sundays.' Sometimes I wondered if he knew how dangerous a shell might be, as he never showed the least sign of fear, he was merely annoyed if they burst near enough to shake him."

Protected from the sun by a large white umbrella, Sargent worked in much the same manner as he did in the Alps or on the canals of Venice. He made watercolors and oil sketches of soldiers stealing fruit, soldiers in a hospital tent, soldiers being led to a dressing station after an attack of poison gas. This last subject stayed with him. "The Ministry of War expects an epic," Sargent wrote to Evan Charteris, "and how can one do an epic without masses of men?" He mentions several crowded frontline scenes, then comes back to "a harrowing sight, a field full of gassed and blindfolded men." By the end of 1918 Sargent had turned this sub-

ject into a twenty-foot-long painting, *Gassed*.

Though not on the same grand scale as *Gassed*, *The Arrival of the American Troops at the Front* is an important testimony to the motives behind Sargent's work. Like Winslow Homer, Sargent painted what he saw. That purpose was foremost in his mind. No melodrama is attempted. The eye that records is obviously cool. The titles of his works were prosaic and matter of fact.

After the war, Sargent continued to paint, and the British government kept finding new things for him to do. Admirers encouraged him to become president of the Royal Academy, but Sargent would have no part in that, disliking the pomp and circumstance that accompanied the position. He returned to the United States and continued painting until his death in 1925.

Remington, perhaps best known for his work in bronze, was an accomplished painter and illustrator. Like any artist, Remington received his share of both positive and negative criticism, but the positive was perhaps the more telling. In the December 10, 1901 *New York Commercial Advertiser* one critic noted, "In the bright ones . . . depicting the night the artist is more successful . . . and he secures considerable sentiment with his paint. . . . [Remington's themes were] the real thing, never for a moment for the stage."

In the December 11, 1901 edition of the *New York Sun* another critic wrote, "[*Night Herd* proved what] Remington can do when he takes off his illustration thinking cap and views his problem seriously and solely from the painter's point of view." About an exhibition of recent paintings by Remington held at the Noe Gallery in New York City April 6 through 18, 1903, a critic for the *New York Times* commented, "I have seen paintings of his which were hard as nails. But then came a change, beginning with his exhibition of night scenes, where a painter took the place of the illustrator's brittle pen drawings and blaring reds and yellows."

The Stampede, Frederic Remington, 0127.2329



A review in the *New York Times* from 1906 reads, "it is a softened and harmonized Remington we find this year, his pictures having atmosphere and looking for all the world as if he had been abroad studying the delicate aerial niceties we find in Corot and Manet, Pissarro and LeSidaner. He takes the shades of night to help him to those tones of mystery which most of his previous pictures lacked."

Referring to an exhibition of Remington's work held at M. Knoedler and Co. in New York from December 1

through 12, 1908, a review in the December 3 *Globe* noted, "Frederic Remington sounds a purely American note. His color is purer, more vibrant, more telling, and his figures are more in atmosphere. Go see the pictures!" It was after this exhibition that Remington wrote to a friend of his, John Howard, "My show made a great hit. I am no longer an illustrator."

Finally, in two reviews of a 1909 exhibition called "Twenty Impressive Paintings of the West," the writers summed up Remington's career. "It must be extremely trying for those commentators on pictorial art who always insisted this distinguished artist was 'only an illustrator' and decried his ability to paint, to visit such an exhibition as the present one. For by this time, they must be impressed with the fact that Remington's work is splendid in its technique, epic in its imaginative qualities, and historically important in its prominent contributions to the records of the most romantic epoch in the making of the West. American history, so far as it is concerned with the conquest of the plains and the Indians, will be made more vivid to the youths of the future through Remington's canvases and drawings, than through printed pages, no matter who the author."

Great words for a great artist whose life was all too short. The legacy Remington left has been unsurpassed in its quality, technique, and importance to history.



The Hungry Moon, Frederic Remington, 0127.2331

UNCLE TOM'S CABIN; OR, LIFE AMONG THE LOWLY.

BY
HARRIET BEECHER STOWE.



VOL. I.

BOSTON:
JOHN P. JEWETT & COMPANY.
CLEVELAND, OHIO:
JEWETT, PROCTOR & WORTHINGTON.
1852.

RARE BOOKS
AND MEMORABLE
WRITERS

GENTLE READER AS CRITIC

It's not only paintings and sculpture in the Gilcrease Collection that have interesting histories of influence and acclaim, mixed reviews, or dramatic rises and falls in popularity, but also a number of rare volumes and first editions in the museum's library and archival holdings. Sarah Erwin, Curator of Archival Collections at Gilcrease, tells the absorbing stories of six influential writers and their works represented in the Gilcrease collection.

Josiah Gregg
Journal and Map
Commerce of the Prairies, 1844

Harriet Beecher Stowe
Uncle Tom's Cabin, 1852
Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin,
1853

Dred; A Tale of the Great
Dismal Swamp, 1856

Helen Hunt Jackson
Ramona, 1884
California and The Missions,
1903

Theodore Roosevelt
Hunting Trips of a Ranchman,
1885

Owen Wister
Lin McLean, 1898
The Virginian, 1902

Charles M. Russell
Rawhide Raulins Stories, 1921
More Rauhides, 1925
Trails Plowed Under, 1927
Good Medicine, 1929

Uncle Tom's Cabin was first printed in the antislavery weekly newspaper, *National Era*. It appeared in forty installments between June 1851 and April 1852. It was then published as a two-volume set, and within a year 300,000 copies had been sold. The book was the object of intense controversy when it was published and remains the subject of extensive critical analysis.

FACING: HARRIET BEECHER STOWE

TITLE PAGE,

UNCLE TOM'S CABIN 3426.377 AND 3426.378



JOSIAH GREGG



Commerce of the Prairies WAS ACCLAIMED FOR ITS SUPPORT OF THE EXPANSIONIST POLICIES OF THE UNITED STATES AND OF THE DOCTRINE OF MANIFEST DESTINY. SALES CONTINUED THROUGH THE MEXICAN WAR (1846-1848) AND THE CEDING OF THE TERRITORY OF NEW MEXICO TO THE UNITED STATES IN 1850. BY THE FOLLOWING YEAR THE BOOK WAS IN ITS FIFTH AMERICAN EDITION, AND THERE WERE TWO GERMAN EDITIONS, BUT AFTER THE CONCLUSION OF THE MEXICAN WAR INTEREST IN THE BOOK DECLINED, AND FOR THE NEXT FIFTY YEARS IT RECEIVED LITTLE ATTENTION.

Josiah Gregg's only publication was a two-volume set entitled *Commerce of the Prairies; or, the Journal of a Santa Fé Trader, during Eight Expeditions across the Great Western Prairies, and a Residence of Nearly Nine Years in Northern Mexico*. Published in 1844, this set has earned Gregg a distinct position at the forefront of literary historians of the early American frontier.

Gregg was born in Tennessee, but during his childhood years the family moved four times—each time farther westward—and eventually established a homestead near what would become Independence, Missouri. A frail child, Gregg was released from arduous farm labor and allowed to follow intellectual pursuits. By the winter of 1830-1831, Gregg had become an invalid and he later wrote, "In this hopeless condition, my physicians advised me to take a trip across the Prairies." Traveling to the West to cure a variety of ailments was fashionable in the mid to late nineteenth century. The rigors of travel, the austere diet, and a different climate provided

Commerce of the Prairies by Josiah Gregg. 2526.1451. After several publishers turned down Gregg hired John Bigelow as an editor. Within six months Henry G. Langley in New York City published the two-volume set. As a result of his writing, Gregg is often referred to as "the Historian of the Santa Fe Trade."

Right, photograph of Gregg taken at the studio of G. Wertz in Kansas City, Missouri. 4326.5496

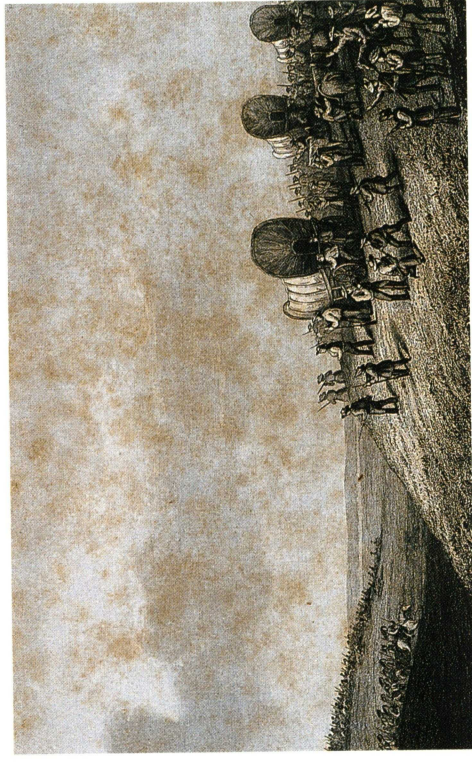


ed a healthy change for many travelers. Three months into his journey, Gregg was a healthy man, and he remained well as long as he was on the Plains.

During the next nine years, from 1831 to 1840, Gregg traveled across the Southern Plains eight times. On his first trip to Santa Fe, Gregg initially worked as a bookkeeper for one of the merchants in the caravan. Soon thereafter he became a trader himself. He established a base in

Santa Fe and later traveled on to Saltillo and Chihuahua, Mexico. The Santa Fe trade, which had flourished as merchants from the United States transported goods to the northern provinces of Mexico, began to decline during the late 1830s. The trade was closed by the Mexican government in 1843 due to border problems with the Republic of Texas; concerning these issues Texas had the support of the United States.

Gregg next traveled some in Texas and by 1843 decided to write about his adventures, working from his extensive journals. The project of writing, editing, and publishing took about a year and a half. In June 1844 the H.G. Langley Company published 2,000 copies of the two-volume set. *Commerce of*



Illustrations from *Commerce of the Prairies*: "Indian Alarm on the Cimarrono River," Volume 2 frontispiece (above), and "Arrival of the Caravan at Santa Fe" (below).





MANY FACTORS CONTRIBUTED TO THE SUCCESS OF *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. ONE OF THESE WAS REALISM, DERIVED FROM THE AUTHOR'S OWN OBSERVATIONS AND THE USE OF AUTHENTIC SOURCES.

Harriet Beecher Stowe was a product of Calvinism and of New England. The daughter of a Congregational minister, she was a teacher and, before her marriage, had published some brief works. Following marriage, her family quickly grew to include seven children, and Stowe wrote stories to lessen her workload by earning funds for domestic help. Prompted by the passage of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, she wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The story was published in forty installments in the *National Era*, an antislavery weekly newspaper, and she was paid \$300. After its appearance in the *National Era*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was published by John P. Jewett of Boston as a two-volume set in 1852. The first edition of 5,000 copies was depleted within nine months. In the first year 300,000 volumes were sold, and, maintaining sales of 1,000 copies a week, the book had sold half a million copies by 1857.

Uncle Tom's Cabin was designed to expose the evils of the institution of slavery. According to Stowe, her objective was to demonstrate the "wrongs and sorrows, under a system so necessarily cruel and unjust as to defeat and do away the good effects of all that can be attempted for them, by their best friends, under it." The novel not only became a bestseller but also served as a moral instrument. Stowe's triumph in drawing attention to slavery and those it involved is demonstrated by the sales of her work.

Many factors contributed to the success of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. One of these was realism, derived from the author's own observations and the use of authentic sources. While living in southern Ohio, which bordered the slaveholding South, she had had numerous conversations with former slaves. To first hand accounts Stowe added what she had learned from reading. For example, the famous episode of Eliza crossing the frozen river has been traced to an 1851 article in *A Friend of Youth*, a children's antislavery magazine. Finally, Stowe continued her research by seeking living resources. Also in 1851, she wrote to the freedman and abolitionist Frederick Douglass about her undertaking, explaining that since the location of a section of the book would be a cotton plantation, "I am very desirous, therefore, to gain information from one who has been an actual laborer

A KEY TO UNCLE TOM'S CABIN;

PREPARED FOR GENERAL

FACTS AND DOCUMENTS

UPON WHICH THE STORY IS FOUNDED.

FOURTH EDITION

Corroborative Statements

VERIFIED

THE TRUTH OF THE WORK.

BY HARRIET BEECHER STOWE,
AUTHOR OF "UNCLE TOM'S CABIN."

BOSTON:
PUBLISHED BY JOHN P. JEWETT & CO.
CLEVELAND, OHIO,
JEWETT, PROCTOR & WORTHINGTON,
LONDON: LOW AND COMPANY,
1853.

Title page of *A Key to
Uncle Tom's Cabin*,
4326.383

In 1853, the year following the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe attempted to answer criticisms of her work with this second volume. It contains documentary evidence to substantiate her narrative.

on one, and it occurred to me that in the circle of your acquaintance there might be one who would be able to communicate to me some such information. . . ." To the foundation of realism, the author added another major ingredient—the moral zeal that came from her Beecher heritage.

Many of Stowe's contemporaries welcomed her efforts. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* won the praise of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Ralph Waldo Emerson, who wrote that the novel spoke "to the universal heart, and was read with equal interest to three audiences, namely, in the parlor, in the kitchen, and in the nursery of every house." Henry James wrote that in his youth he found the drama of the work a thrilling "aesthetic adventure." *Uncle Tom's Cabin* also provoked opposition, primarily in the South. In the October 1852 issue, George F.



THE FREEMAN'S DEFENSE. Page 284.



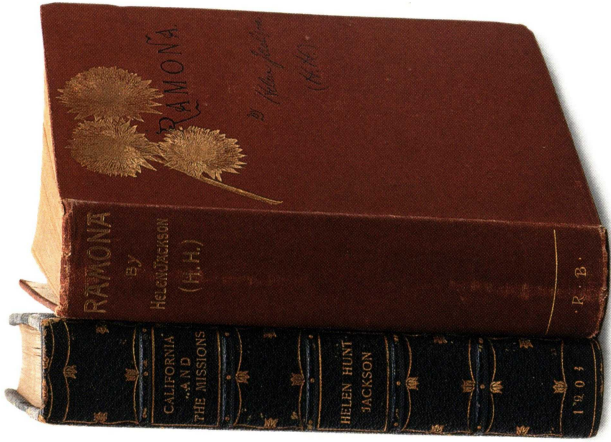
LITTLE EVA READING THE BIBLE TO UNCLE TOM IN THE ARBOR. Page 63

Illustrations from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: "The Freeman's Defense," page 284 (above), and "Little Eva Reading the Bible to Uncle Tom in the Arbor," page 63 (below).

"If it had been only a Hungarian youth, now bravely defending in some mountain fastness the retreat of fugitives escaping from Austria to America, this would have been sublime heroism; but as it was a youth of African descent, defending the retreat of fugitives through America into Canada, of Course we are too well instructed and patriotic to see any heroism in it . . ."

...

"Tom and Eva were seated on a little mossy seat, in an arbor, at the foot of the garden. It was Sunday evening, and Eva's Bible lay open on her knee. She read, 'And I saw a sea of glass, mingled with fire.'"



HELEN HUNT JACKSON



"I DID NOT WRITE *Ramona*. IT WAS WRITTEN THROUGH ME. MY LIFEBLOOD WENT INTO IT — ALL I HAD THOUGHT, FELT, AND SUFFERED FOR FIVE YEARS ON THE INDIAN QUESTION." SHE HOPED TO PROVOKE PUBLIC OUTRAGE AS HAD HARRIET BEECHER STOWE WITH *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. THE VOLUME WAS AN IMMEDIATE SUCCESS; WITHIN A YEAR *Ramona* SOLD MORE THAN FIFTEEN THOUSAND COPIES.

Helen Hunt Jackson was one of the most prolific women writers of the nineteenth century. Her works include hundreds of poems, children's stories, essays, travel sketches, and book reviews. She also published more than twenty books. Most of her writing has fallen into obscurity, but she is remembered for *A Century of Dishonor* and *Ramona*. *A Century of Dishonor*, which was published in 1881, chronicles the mistreatment of several American Indian tribes and the injustice of federal Indian policies. The novel *Ramona*, published in 1884, was intended to direct attention to the plight of the Native Americans living near the California missions.

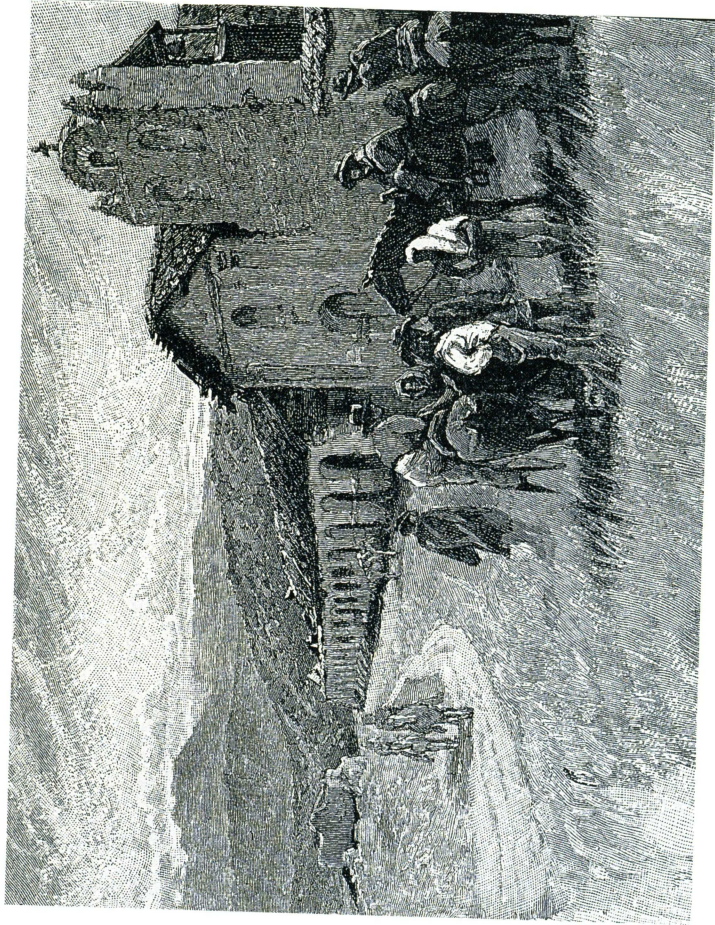


Illustration from *California and the Missions*: "Santa Ynez Mission," page 10.

"Mission after mission was successfully founded, until, in 1804, the occupation of the sea-coast line from San Francisco to San Diego was complete, there being nineteen mission establishments only an easy day's journey apart from each other In these nineteen missions were gathered over twenty thousand Indians, leading regular and industrious lives, and conforming to the usages of the Catholic religion."

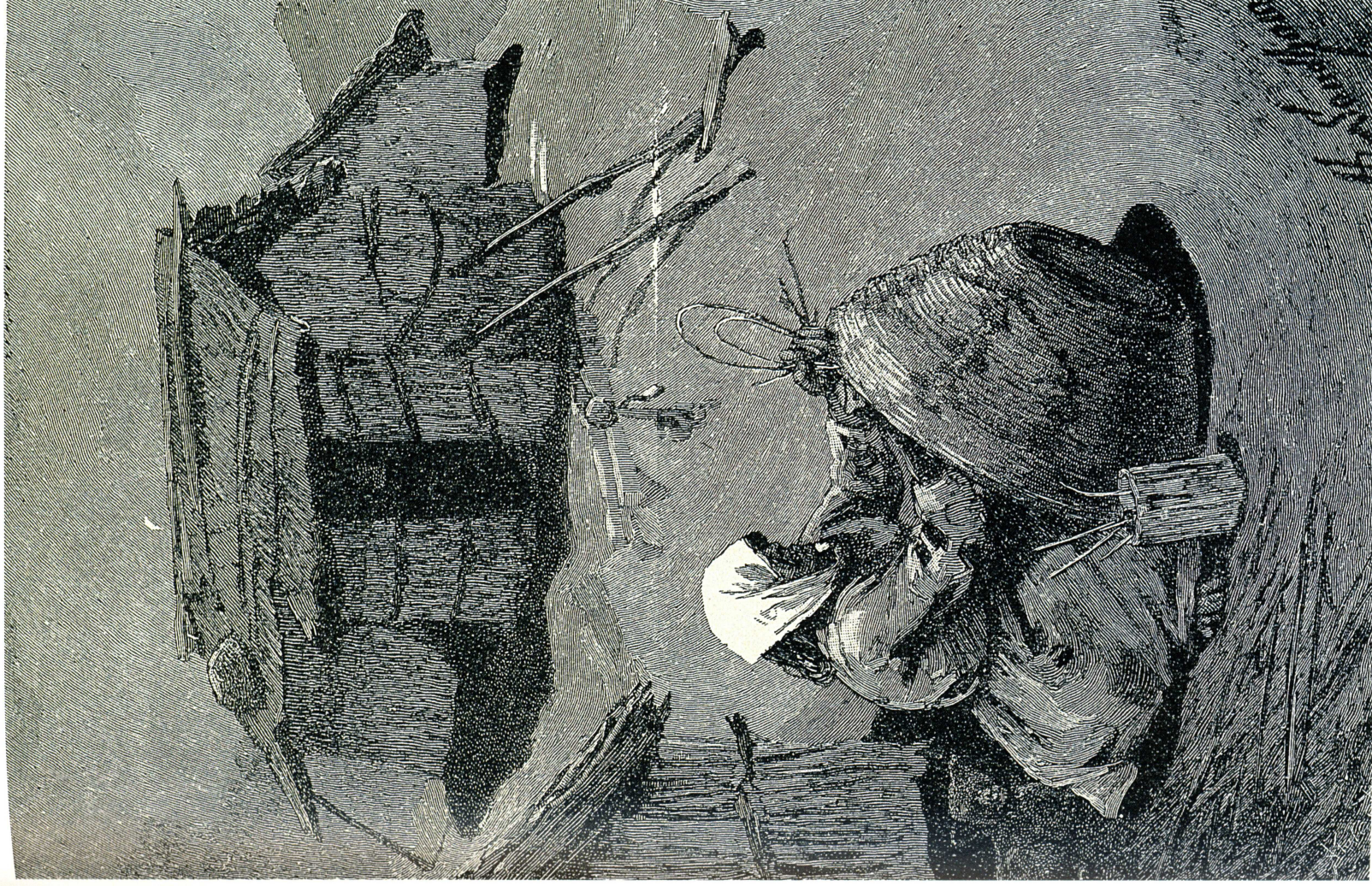


Illustration from *California and the Missions*: "Old Squaw Weaving Baskets," page 106.

"Most of the original Mexican grants included tracts of land on which Indians were living, sometimes large villages of them. In many of these grants, in accordance with old Spanish law or custom, was incorporated a clause protecting the Indians. They were to be left undisturbed in their homes."

Jackson's personal life was filled with tragedy—with the death of both parents by the time she was seventeen and, within about a ten year period, the deaths of a son, husband, and her remaining child. Overwhelmed and alone, she began expressing her grief in her writing. In 1865, three months after losing her second son, her first well-known poem was published in the *Nation*. She was encouraged by favorable responses to her early works. Her writing, along with the work of a number of other women authors, focused upon home and



Old Mission Indian, and Ruins of Mission.
San Juan Capistrano

Illustration from
*California and the
Missions*: "Old Mission
Indian, and Ruins of
Mission, San Juan
Capistrano," page 111.

"In 1852 a report in regard to these [California] Indians was made to the Interior Department by the Hon. B.D. Wilson, of Los Angeles He estimates that there were at that time in the counties of Tulare, Santa Barbara, Los Angeles, and San Diego over fifteen thousand Indians who had been connected with the missions in those counties."

family values. These themes appealed to great numbers of readers of both newspapers and magazines as the Civil War and industrialization changed American society. During the nineteenth century she was often compared to the American poet Emily Dickinson.

In the spring of 1872, the writer made her first trip to the West, traveling on the newly completed transcontinental railroad. During this journey she wrote a series of travel articles concerning San Francisco, the Napa Valley, and Yosemite Valley for the *New York Independent*. She also noted an interest in the old Spanish missions of the state. The following year, for health concerns, she traveled to Colorado Springs. There she met, and two years later married, William S. Jackson, a successful banker and railroad promoter. Now free from financial worries, the author devoted much of her time to writing and traveling. She published several additional works, and while in Boston in 1879, attended a lecture that altered the remainder of her writings and life.

Standing Bear, a leader of the Ponca tribe, was touring the East with a small group to increase awareness of the hardships faced by the Ponca. The small, agricultural Plains tribe had been forced to move several times, through repeated federal government errors; and had faced extreme suffering, starvation, and disease. Jackson, who had often spoken against women who supported causes, soon began to research and to write about the Native American cause. Her articles appeared in several New York newspapers, and she initiated an intense correspondence with the Secretary of Interior. Her research expanded, and in 1881 Jackson published *A Century of Dishonor: A Sketch of the United States Government's Dealing with Some of the Indian Tribes*. The volume was disorganized and was not a bestseller, but still attracted notice from many who were unaware of the continued plight of the native peoples.

Also in 1881, Jackson was commissioned to write several articles for *Century Magazine* concerning the California mission Indians. These articles were later

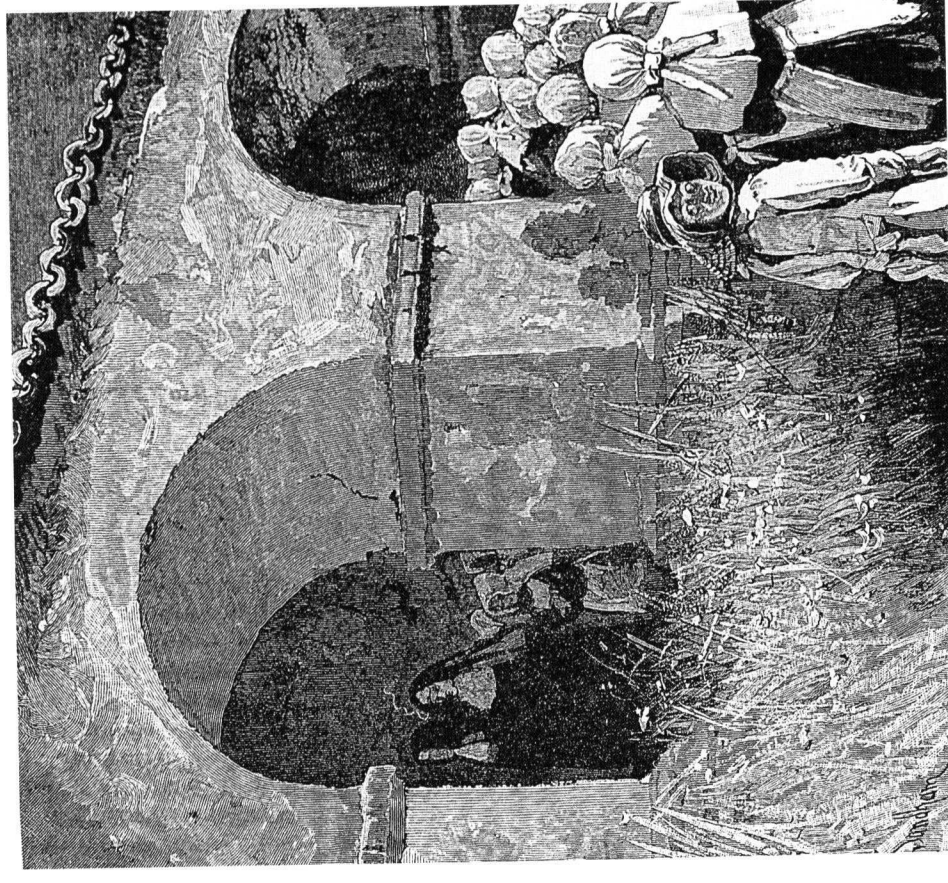


Illustration from
*California and the
Missions*: "San Juan
Bautista," page 94.

"At San Juan Bautista there lingers more of the atmosphere of the olden time than is to be found in any other place in California. The mission church is well preserved; its grounds are enclosed and cared for . . . the black-robed sisters walking before them with crossed hands and placid faces."

BOSTON:
ROBERTS BROTHERS.
1885.

Ramona, 3426.1741

Ramona was published in 1884, first in serial form in the *Christian Union* and, several months later, as a single volume. The volume was an immediate success, and within a year sold more than fifteen thousand copies. Critical opinion varied; the *Nation* approved Jackson's noble effort, but criticized the work's lack of structure and the anticlimactic happy ending. In *North American Review* the book was praised as "unquestionably the best novel yet produced by an American woman."

reprinted under varying titles. The following year she accepted an appointment as a special commissioner from President Chester A. Arthur. Along with Abbot Kinney, she was to investigate the dilemma in California and to suggest possible reforms. Jackson's and Kinney's *Report on the Condition and Needs of the Mission Indians of California* was issued in 1883, but was largely ignored by the Department of Interior. President Arthur proposed a bill to benefit the California Indians, which was passed by the Senate, but was defeated in the House of Representatives. Although little had changed as an outgrowth of her writing since encountering Standing Bear, the work had prepared Jackson to write the novel for which she is best remembered.

Ramona was published in 1884, first in serial form in the *Christian Union* and several months later as a single volume. The author related to friends that the plot came to her one October morning in Colorado. She then traveled to New York and during a four month period wrote two to three thousand words daily. Jackson commented that "I did not write *Ramona*. It was written through me. My lifeblood went into it—all I had thought, felt, and suffered for five years on the Indian question." She hoped to provoke public outrage as had Harriet Beecher Stowe with *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The volume was an immediate success; within a year *Ramona* sold more than fifteen thousand copies.

Many contemporary critics praised the work. *The North American Review* proclaimed *Ramona* "unquestionably the best novel yet produced by an American woman." *Atlantic Monthly* noted that the narrative worked well because although readers became distressed about the plight of the Indians, they never lost interest in the developing story. *The Nation* approved Jackson's noble effort, but criticized the work's lack of structure and the anticlimactic happy ending. In 1939 in a review for the *Boston Evening Transcript*, Howard M. Jones maintained that *Ramona* had the strength of Longfellow's *Evangeline*. Modern critics, such as historian Allan Nevins, agree. Nevins writes that *Ramona* "bears evidence of a hasty writing of a passionate woman eager to throw her message upon paper. The construction is so ill planned that the reader is sometimes puzzled by a failure to observe even the temporal order of events . . . Yet with all its faults *Ramona* has the indispensable virtue of vitality."

Since its publication *Ramona* has remained popular. It has been reprinted several hundred times and has been enacted in many plays, movies, and on television. However, it is still debated whether *Ramona* achieved Jackson's objective of increasing public indignation concerning the treatment of American Indians. Actual changes in federal policies or legislation did not come about as a result of Helen Hunt Jackson's zealous writing. She did publicize the issues and increased support for groups such as the Indian Rights Association. In *A Century of Dishonor* and *Ramona*, Jackson's contributions to literature and history are among the most important of nineteenth century writers.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT



Hunting Trips of a Ranchman contains descriptions of stalking a variety of animals and birds—including buffalo, grizzly bear, mountain sheep, and grouse. Roosevelt perceived himself as a naturalist, often describing the wildlife as "most delicious eating." However, he deplored wanton slaughter and advocated killing only for food. He also unintentionally created the industry of teddy bears after reports circulated that he spared the life of a bear cub.

Theodore Roosevelt is well known as the twenty-sixth president of the United States, Rough Rider, reformer, conservationist, and world traveler. He is also a respected author who created a significant number of published works. Roosevelt's subjects were quite diverse, varying from writings on naturalism to history, to biographies. The American West was the theme of some of his most acclaimed writings. Ultimately Roosevelt published several volumes concerning Western history as well as essays of Western adventures. The future president traveled to Dakota Territory in 1883, where he used much of his inheritance to purchase cattle and land near the community of Little Missouri. The following year, after the death of his wife and mother,

Roosevelt settled at the Elkhorn ranch seeking consolation and distraction. From this experience in the Dakota Bad Lands came a natural history trilogy: *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman* was published in 1885, *Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail* issued in 1888, and *The Wilderness Hunter* published in 1893. Each volume focused on some of Roosevelt's favorite topics—exploring, hunting, and life outdoors.

Hunting Trips of a Ranchman was written while

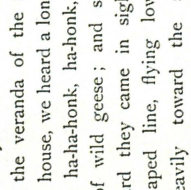
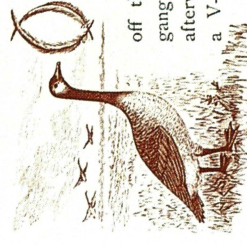
Roosevelt was living at Elkhorn ranch. It was his first work concerning the West, although it was the fourth publication in his literary career. *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman* contains descriptions of stalking a

Page 43 of Roosevelt's
*Hunting Trips of a
Ranchman*, 2626.288

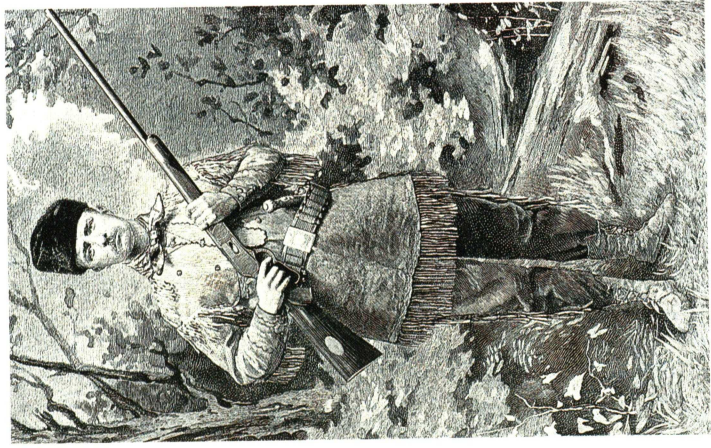


CHAPTER II.

WATERFOWL.



NE cool afternoon in the early fall, while sitting on the veranda of the ranch-house, we heard a long way off the ha-ha-honk, ha-honk, of a gang of wild geese ; and shortly afterward they came in sight, in a V-shaped line, flying low and heavily toward the south, along the course of the stream. They went by within a hundred yards of the house, and we watched them for some minutes as they flew up the valley, for they were so low in the air that it seemed certain that they would soon alight ; and light they did when they were less than a mile past us. As the ground was flat and without much cover where they had settled, I took the rifle instead of a shot-gun and hurried after them on foot. Wild geese are very watchful and wary, and as I came toward the place where I thought



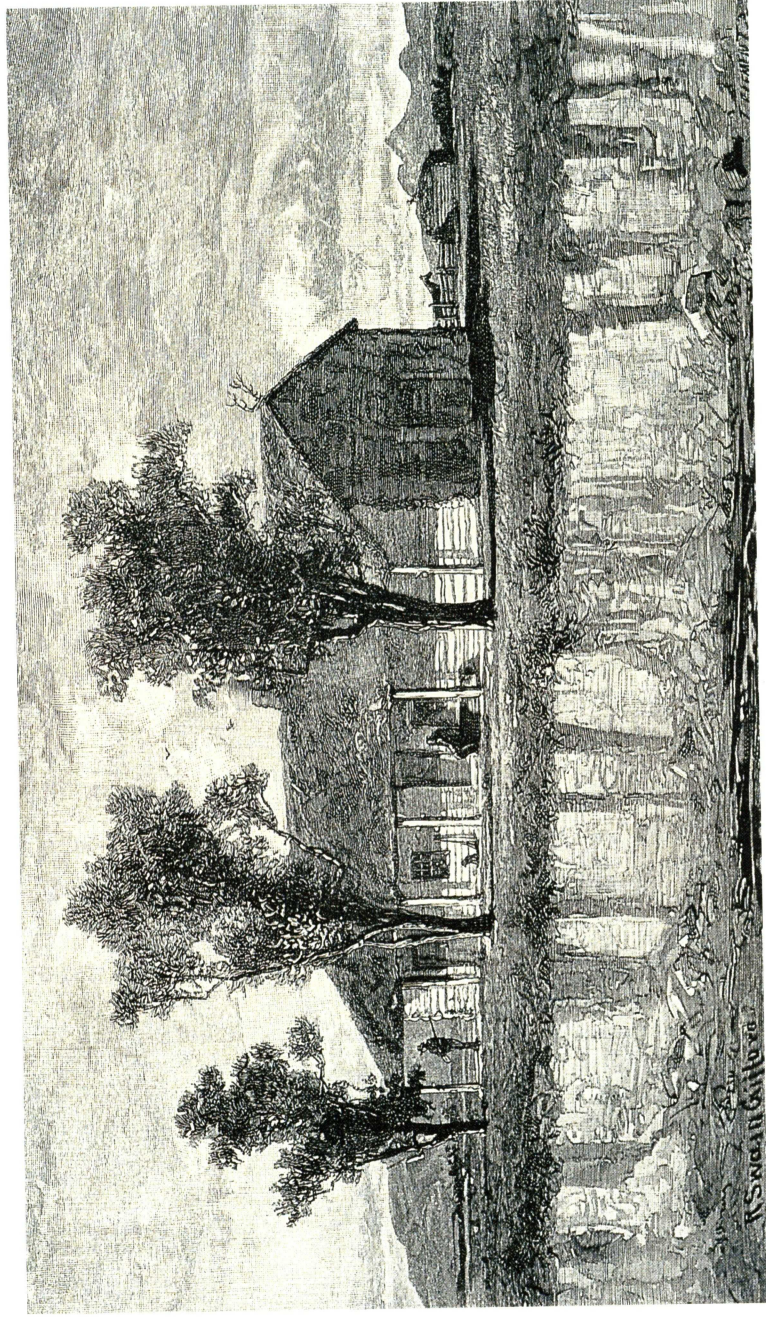
variety of animals and birds—including buffalo, grizzly bear, mountain sheep, and grouse. Roosevelt perceived himself as a naturalist, often describing the wildlife as “most delicious eating.” However, he deplored wanton slaughter and advocated killing only for food. He also unintentionally created the industry of teddy bears after



In 1884 Roosevelt had a series of studio photographs taken of himself wearing western garb and carrying his rifle, before a painted backdrop with imitation grass in the foreground. This photo was the frontispiece for *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman*, written while Roosevelt was living at Elkhorn ranch, near Medora in the Dakota Territory. This photo at right was taken in the 1890s, during the decade he campaigned unsuccessfully for mayor of New York City, became Assistant Secretary to the Navy, organized the Rough Riders, and was elected governor of New York.

reports circulated that he spared the life of a bear cub. Much of *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman* is a discussion of the chase. Of this sport Roosevelt writes, “The chase is among the best of all national pastimes; it cultivates that vigorous manliness for the lack of which in a nation as in an individual the possession of no other qualities can possibly atone.”

In 1899 Gansey R. Johnston reviewed the scope of Roosevelt’s literary efforts. Roosevelt, at the time of this review, was governor of New York. In volume fifty-three of *Book Buyer* Johnston wrote: “As a man of action rather than a man of letters, Colonel Roosevelt has in our American year of 1898 appeared in the public eye. Some of his deeds have been so dramatic that when we come to review his books it will no doubt be difficult to place them in proper perspective. We cannot separate them from the man, whose character is stamped upon all their pages, of whose faults and virtues they partake, of whom, indeed, they have much to say; but by the association we should not be led to under-estimate their inherent value. If the man could maintain his place in the rough democracy of the frontier, where only the individual virtues find recognition, his books may not fear competition on the same ground He is much more than a killer of game. If he is an enthusiastic sportsman, he is a careful zoologist as well. The big game of the United States is rapidly disappearing; those animals which have not become extinct have had their habits modified by the presence of man; and such records as these have a scientific value. In no other books of the class that I know is there less of what scientists call the ‘personal equation.’



The statements may be taken as they stand. The author is writing of his own experiences and observations, and necessarily the capital I’s are plentiful. His modesty, however, deserves mention; steering clear of deprecation on the one hand and of conceit on the other. A hunter once expressed it to me thus: ‘I like Roosevelt’s books; the other fellow gets as much game as he does.’”

In 1988, writing in *The Learned Presidency*, David H. Burton found *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman* a story of immense narrative charm that also revealed Roosevelt’s view of history and beliefs in theories such as social Darwinism. “The history of the West was a history of the change of nature by technology—largely for the good, as Roosevelt judged it. It was the long-range rifle, along with the advance of the cattle industry, that denied the Great Plains to the buffalo and enabled settlers to develop a frontier civilization.”

Roosevelt continued to divide his time between ranching and hunting in the West and politics in the East until the winter of 1886-1887. At that time the extremely severe weather caused the loss of half of his cattle herd, and Roosevelt sold his holdings and returned to the East. The remainder of Theodore Roosevelt’s long and varied career was forever shaped by his experiences in the American West.

Illustration from
Hunting Trips of a Ranchman: “The Elkhorn Ranch-house,” page 30.

“My home ranch-house stands on the river brink. From the low, long veranda, shaded by leafy cottonwoods, one looks across sand bars and shallows to a strip of meadowland, behind which rises a line of sheer cliffs and grassy plateaus The story-high house of hewn logs is clean and neat, with many rooms, so that one can be alone if one wishes to.”

Illustrations from
Hunting Trips of a
Ranchman: "Wagon
Camp at Dawn," page
178 (above), and
"Cutting of Band of
Pronghorn," page 200.



"It was arranged that the wagon should go on a few miles, and then halt for the night as it was already the middle of the afternoon when we started out . . . When we came back to the river valley it was pitch dark, and it was rather ticklish work for our heavily laden horses to pick their way down the steep bluffs and over the rapid stream: nor were we sorry when we saw ahead under a bluff the gleam of the camp fire, as it was reflected back from the canvas-topped prairie schooner, that for the time being represented home to us."

...
"Very few horses indeed are as fast as a prong-horn . . . A prong-horn is by far the fleetest animal on the plains; one can outrun and outlast a deer with the greatest ease."



OWEN WISTER



"*The Virginian* IS A MAN'S BOOK, WITH NOT ONE TOUCH OF SICKLY SENTIMENT, AND MUST BE REGARDED AS A VALUABLE HUMAN DOCUMENT BECAUSE OF THE AUTHOR'S INTIMATE ACQUAINTANCE WITH THE SCENES AND TYPES WHICH IT PORTRAYS." — WILLIAM MORTON PAYNE, EDITOR AND REVIEWER, 1902

"*The Virginian* IS AN UNREALISTIC HORSE OPERA RATHER THAN A SERIOUS PORTRAYAL OF WESTERN LIFE." — BERNARD DeVOTO, 1952

Owen Wister is remembered for his Western stories and for the novel *The Virginian*, which defined many character types and established a plot that became almost a formula for much of the literature about the American West. Wister's life, however, was remote from the frontier of which he so often wrote. He was born near Philadelphia and spent many of his years there or in Charleston, South Carolina. Wister's father was a prominent physician, but his mother was a dominant influence in the life of the couple's only child. His mother was the daughter of a renowned actress, an accomplished pianist, a writer for the *Atlantic Monthly* and a translator of French poetry into English. Wister was talented in both music and literature, graduating with highest honors from Harvard University with a degree in music and later studying in Europe. Yielding to his father's wishes, Wister returned home to establish himself in a sensible profession. In 1884 he described his life as "not difficult, but exceedingly monotonous." By the following year Wister was restless, depressed, and in declining health. He then followed the advice of a doctor and the example of numerous friends and traveled west for the summer. In his first Western journal the future writer recorded, "One must come to the West to realize what one may have most probably believed all one's life long—that it is a very much bigger place than the East, and the future of America is just bubbling and seething in bear legs and pinafiores here. I don't wonder a man never comes back [East] after he has once been here for a few years."

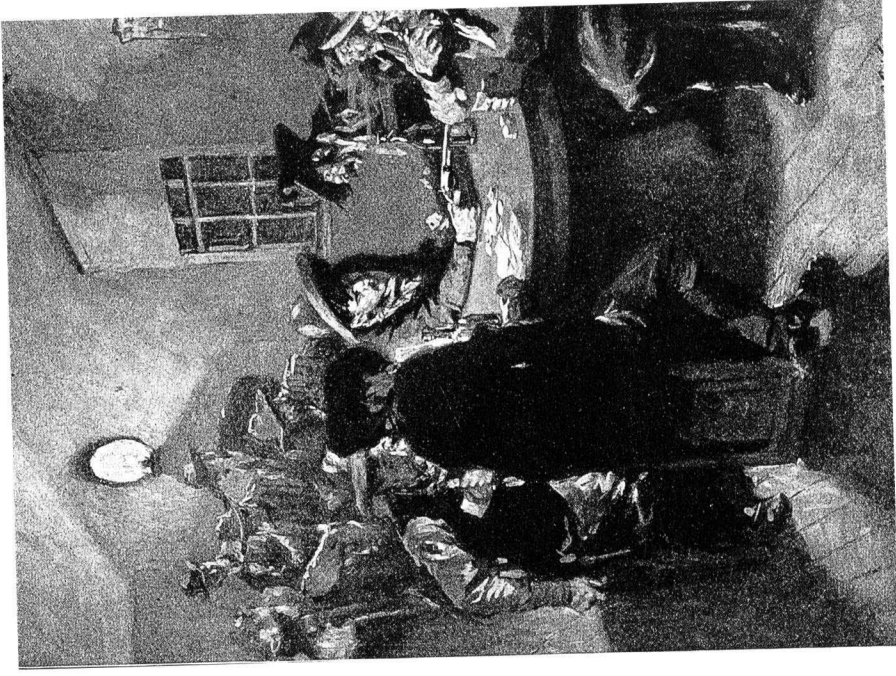
Wister, nevertheless, did return to the East. He attended law school at Harvard and in 1889 began a promising legal career as a member of a Philadelphia firm. Still the Western experience had improved Wister's health

The Virginian, 3427.9743

Many of Wister's stories appeared in *Harper's Weekly* and *Harper's Monthly*, and Harper & Brothers published his bound volumes. But shortly before the publication of *The Virginian*, Wister expressed his disappointment over several issues, including lack of advertising, by signing a contract with The Macmillan Company. Wister's story of an unnamed hero, who came to represent the universal traits and the character of the ideal Western hero, was a tremendous success for both author and publisher.

Illustration from *The Virginian*: "When You Call Me That, Smile," page 29.

"The Virginian's pistol came out, and his hand lay on the table, holding it unaimed. And with a voice as gentle as ever, the voice that sounded almost like a caress, but drawing a very little more than usual, so that there was almost a space between each word, he issued his orders to the man Trampas: 'When you call me that, smile.' And he looked at Trampas across the table."



and affected his imagination. The frontier intrigued him; its unspoiled natural beauty and savage elements, often present before the formation of a stable civilization, were both new experiences. During the next two decades Wister traveled west many times and eventually acquired his own ranch. As an outgrowth of his time in the West, Wister felt a concern that the era of the cowboy be preserved in literature, and in 1891 he began work on a short story. The following year *Harper's Weekly* published two of his stories. By 1893 he considered himself no longer a lawyer, but a writer.

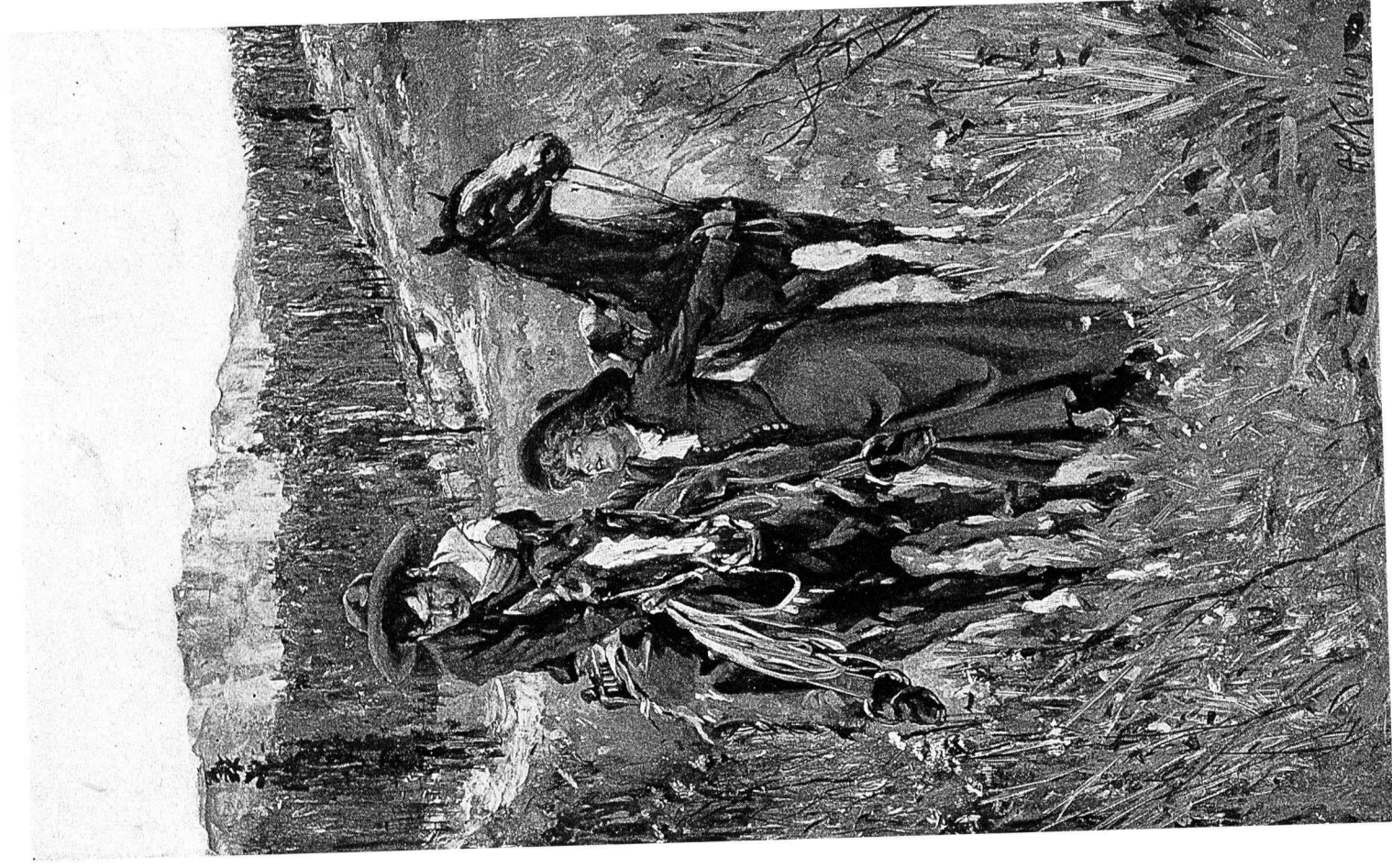
Wister produced numerous short stories that were published in major magazines and later issued as collections. He also published two episodic novels, *Lin McLean* in 1898 and *The Virginian* in 1902. There is still discussion whether these works are novels, as Wister intended them, or are simply related stories. Lin McLean is comprised of six published stories, but little had been altered to make them work together as a novel, and the volume is organized in six sections, with each retaining its original title. An additional difficulty is that the narrative point of view is inconsistent throughout the stories. Critics viewed *Lin McLean* as another collection of loosely related writings. In 1907 a new edition of the work was divided into twenty chapters and included a preface in which

Wister writes that readers should have recognized the integrity of the six episodes and how each was "a fragment of an underlying drama."

Lin McLean follows the life of the title character from his wild youth into his manhood, as he marries and acquires a ranch. McLean is portrayed as the typical independent Western hero, but even in McLean's personal success, Wister develops the theme of the vanishing West. The opening sentence of the volume sets the story in "the old days, the happy days, when Wyoming was a Territory with a future instead of a State with a past, and the unfenced cattle grazed upon her ranges by prosperous thousands." The tone remains poignant in the episode "How Lin McLean Went East," in which the naturalness of young Lin is seen in contrast to the snobbery of his brother Frank. The Bostonian brother, functioning as a symbol of unnatural Eastern pretensions, is used to expose flaws in the false civilization of the East and to illus-

Illustration from *The Virginian*: "By His Side the Girl Walking and Cheering Him Forward," frontispiece, text on page 332.

"She saw his teeth clinched and his drooping muscles compelled by will; and as he rode she walked to lend him support, leading her horse by a backward-stretched left hand, she counted off the distance to him continually—the increasing gain, the lessening road, the landmarks nearing and dropping behind."



trate the virtues of a frontier life. In 1968 G. Edward White reasoned, "Frank McLean has become so caught up in the trappings of civilization that he has lost the qualities that in Wister's eyes made a man 'civilized'—reverence for



Illustration from *The Virginian*: "Frawgs Are Dead, Trampas, and So Are You," page 200.

"'And if ever yu' see a man that hides his feet an' won't take off his socks in company, he has worked in them. Tulare swamps an' got the disease. Catch him wadin', and yu'll find he's web-footed. Frawgs are dead, Trampas, and so are you.' The enthusiast [listening to the Virginian's tale] came up and shook hands."

family ties, sense of tradition, and loyalty to kindred—but Lin exhibits these qualities and senses the selfishness that lies beneath Frank's superficial polish. In this gift for stripping away the veneer of civilization and catching the true gist of a man's nature, Lin, for Wister, is representative of his 'spurred and booted kindred.' Wister himself later wrote, "Celluloid good-fellowship passes for ivory with nine in ten of the city crowd, but not so with the sons of the sagebrush. They live nearer nature, and they know better." The volume found some success, but perhaps it is most important as preparation for his most famous work, *The Virginian*.

The Virginian: A Horseman of the Plains was an immediate success. It was reprinted fifteen times in its first eight months, remained a bestseller for a year and a half, and by the time of the author's death in 1938 had sold one and a half million hard cover copies. It has remained among the most consistent sellers in American literary history. The book appealed to American patriotism it also attracted readers in an era of increasing industrialization and urbanization, when people yearned for independence, opportunity, and space as imagined on the vanishing frontier. *The Virginian* was dedicated to a friend Wister had made during his undergraduate days at Harvard, Theodore Roosevelt.

The foundation of the volume was five previously published stories, but Wister developed characters and changed structure, rewriting sections and adding four new chapters. He succeeded in creating the ideal hero—and established the romantic myth of the American cowboy. Known only as the

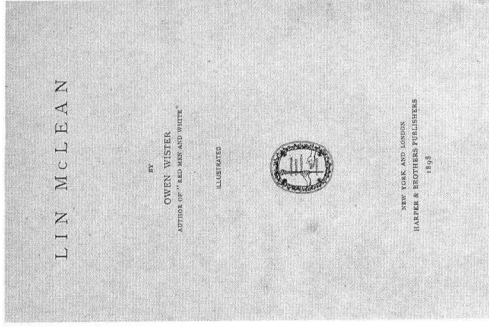
Virginian, the principal character is a natural gentleman who is fun loving yet believes in responsible actions. He is handsome and has native intelligence, progressing from cowboy to foreman to ranch owner. In time he must also face the now typical Western villain and win the woman he loves. This woman, Molly Wood, a schoolteacher who journeys to Wyoming from Vermont, represents the advancement of the East into the West and the sometimes difficult but positive adjustments of a changing society. Situated in the cattle country of Wyoming between 1874 and 1890, *The Virginian* presents a frontier that Wister felt that was already only a memory. His writings were an attempt to keep the old West from further disappearing, although he was historian enough to recognize and to include the change as inescapable.

In addition to its great popular success, *The Virginian* received critical notice at the time of its publication. William Morton Payne, a longtime literary editor for several Chicago publications, reviewed the book soon after its appearance. He concluded his glowing review, "*The Virginian* is a man's book, with not one touch of sickly sentiment, and must be regarded as a valuable human document because of the author's intimate acquaintance with the scenes and types which it portrays."

Fifty years later Bernard DeVoto, a controversial literary critic and historian, argued "*The Virginian* is an unrealistic horse opera rather than a serious portrayal of Western life." He was also troubled by Wister's acceptance of violence as a moral solution.

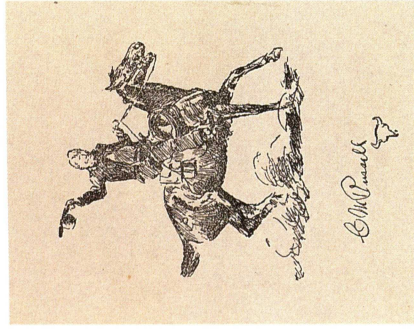
More recently Michael Butler of the University of Kansas has written, "In terms of form and technique little distinguished his early work from late. Wister refined what he had begun with; he did not experiment. His notebooks make clear that as he wandered through the West looking for material, he did not seek to assimilate or understand the region as much as he sought out those striking characters and incidents which fit his conceptions of what literature was and life ought to be. His search was in a sense a voyage more of justification than of exploration. Consequently his fiction did not reveal the West as much as it illustrated one static version of it."

Today Owen Wister is not regarded as a major figure in American literature. He did, however, have great influence on the writing of Western American fiction. As the first serious writer to utilize the images of the cowboy and cattle culture, he also established a formula of characters and plot for Western stories. *The Virginian* not only offers grand entertainment, but also has shaped American's view of their legendary past.



Lin McLean, 3426.9751

Published as a single volume in 1898, *Lin McLean* is comprised of six short stories that had been previously printed in magazines. Few changes had been made to unify them into a novel. In a 1907 edition of *Lin McLean*, Wister wrote that readers should have recognized the integrity of the six episodes and how each was "a fragment of an underlying drama," yet he altered the format to that of twenty chapters.



Last page of *More Rawhides*. Russell concluded *More Rawhides* with another self portrait, this time bidding farewell to the reader.

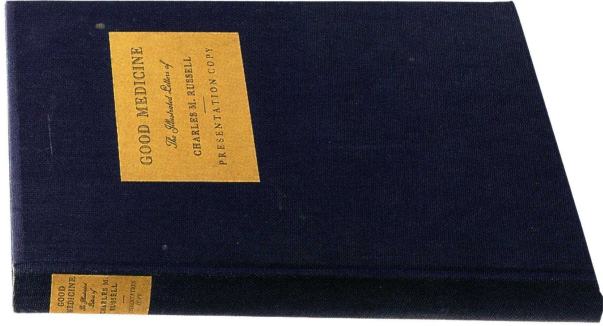


Trails Plowed Under CONTAINED EIGHT STORIES THAT RUSSELL HAD NEWLY WRITTEN, THIRTY-THREE TALES REPRINTED FROM *Rawhide Rawlins Stories* AND *More Rawhides*, AND AN INTRODUCTION BY WILL ROGERS. IT WAS IMMEDIATELY SUCCESSFUL WITH THE PUBLIC AND WITH LITERARY CRITICS, AND SINCE ITS PUBLICATION IN 1927 HAS REMAINED ALMOST CONTINUALLY IN PRINT.

Charles M. Russell is among the most widely recognized painters of the American West. He was born in St. Louis to a rather wealthy family, but following an unsuccessful attempt at school, he was allowed to visit Montana. Russell briefly worked on a sheep ranch, spent two years with a trapper and then was hired by a cow outfit as a night wrangler. He also spent time with a group of Piegan, became interested in Plains Indians, and grew to be a strong defender of native rights. These encounters provided not only an understanding of life in Montana, but also provided subject matter for paintings he began making. Russell, however, experienced only the final stages of the open-range era. Much of what he included in his artwork was a nostalgic effort to recreate a vanished past.

The Old West was a mainstay of Russell's painting, especially his later work. By 1893 his artwork had merited enough attention and sales that he was able to devote his full attention to painting. Two years later he met and eventually married Nancy Cooper, through whose promotion Russell grew from a provincial favorite to a nationally known talent. In 1911 his first one-man exhibition in New York, *The West That Has Passed*, brought worldwide recognition. In the paintings done at the height of his career, Russell successfully blends humor and drama. His narrative style, which often included an entertaining quality, led elite art critics to dismiss his work as marginal, but by the same token made it extremely popular with the public.

By early 1888 Russell had begun illustrating magazines and books. He eventually worked on volumes by Theodore Roosevelt, Bret Harre, and Owen Wister. For the 1911 edition of *The Virginian*, Russell contributed forty-three drawings. Concerning this phase of Russell's career, Donald A. Barclay wrote in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, "Although he did good work illustrating the writings of others, some of Russell's best book and magazine work was done for his own first-person stories of western life. Never a good hand at spelling or



Photograph of Russell, 4336.6267

This undated image of Charles M. Russell appears in an album of photographs that contains several pictures of Russell as well as various scenes of Montana. Russell is riding one of his horses, Monte, a pinto he had acquired his first year in Montana and kept until the horse's death in 1903.

grammar, Russell was nevertheless a master storyteller. He was so gifted, in fact, that it is often said that when Russell and his friend Will Rogers were together in a roomful of people, it was Rogers who took a back seat to listen while Russell amused the crowd with his droll tales of cowpunching and western life . . . It was only natural for Russell to illustrate his stories when he eventually took on the laborious task of writing them. Like his paintings, Russell's oral and written stories were based in part on his own experience, in part on stories he had heard, and in part on his nostalgia for the frontier. Whatever the subject of the story, Russell's ear for dialogue and his sense of humor came through."

Writing—inscriptions, poems, letters, or published stories—was not an easy undertaking for Russell. He eventually began to use images to express himself on paper. This he termed "paper talk." In this mode, rules of grammar, spelling and punctuation did not apply. Historian Brian Dippie in *Charles M. Russell, Word Painter* observed that Russell "reserved his highest praise for writers He modeled and drew with ease but labored so mightily to put his thoughts on paper that he was convinced writing was a higher gift." Gradually Russell's self-confidence grew, but the process remained difficult. In writing the now legendary tales that appeared in the *Rawhide Rawlins Stories* and other publications, Russell would struggle with his pencil and paper with Nancy Russell or Percy Raban (a friend who was a journalist and one of the founders of the Montana Newspaper Association) eventually taking down his thoughts as Russell talked. The character of *Rawhide Rawlins* is an old cowboy who narrated or quoted others to relate his tales. These yarns appeared in various Montana

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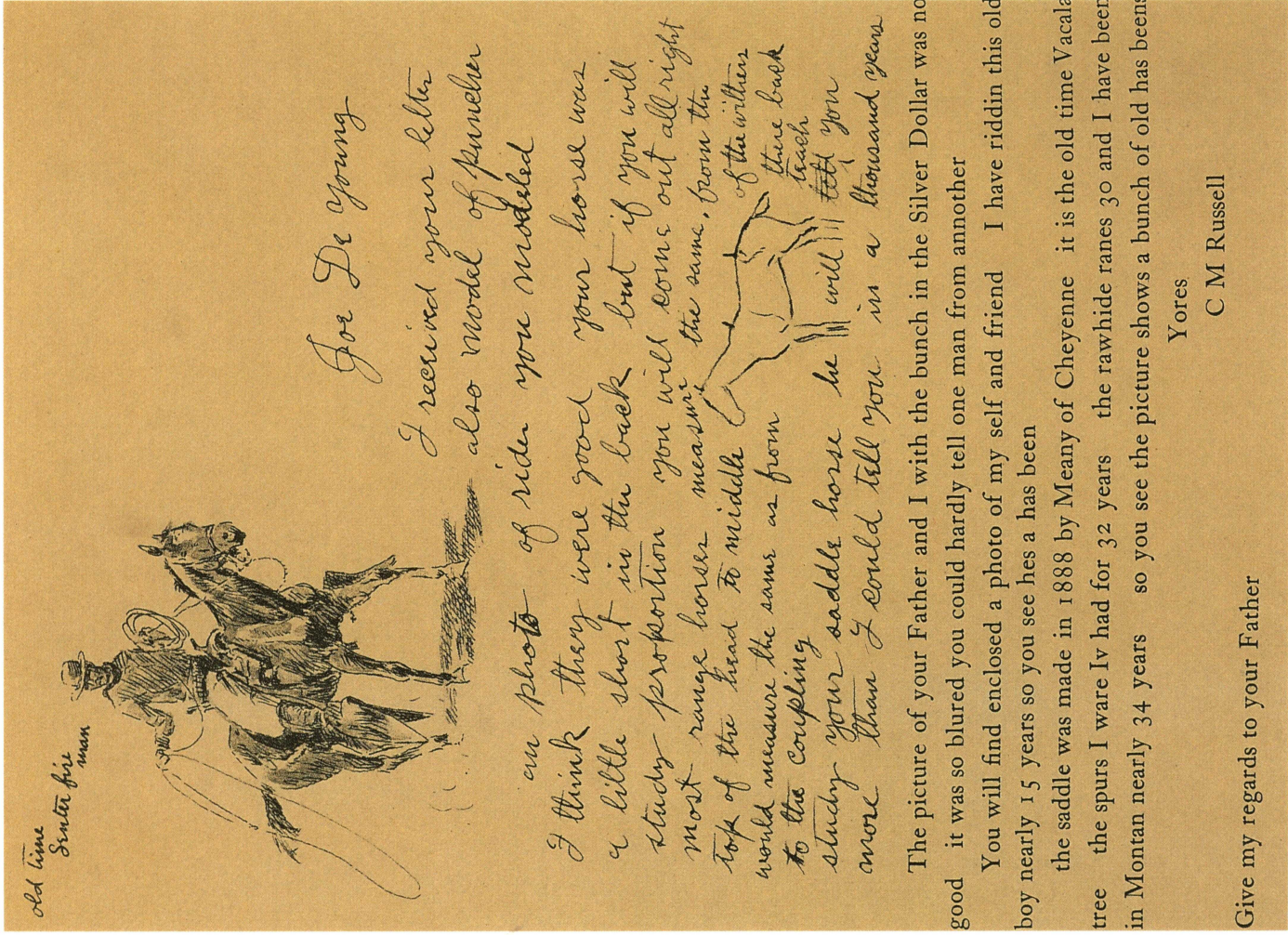
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FRONT COVER: *Mourning Her Brare* by George de Forest Brush
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