

**TELL ME A STORY:
NARRATIVE AND ORALITY IN
NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN VISUAL CULTURE**

by

Catherine H. Walsh

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Art History

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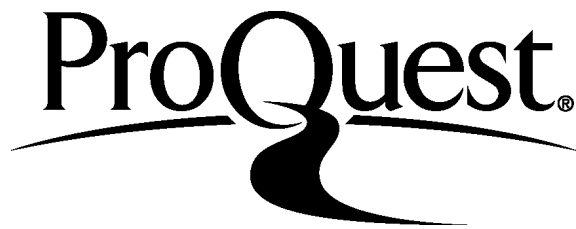
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NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN VISUAL CULTURE**

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores issues of narrative and storytelling as they apply to nineteenth-century art and visual culture, focusing particularly on objects produced between 1830 and 1870. During the decades following the establishment of the National Academy of Design in 1825, artists and patrons struggled to broaden the American art world through the creation of institutions for the display and criticism of art. Genre painting in particular rose to new prominence for American art audiences, with some of its major practitioners like William Sidney Mount and Richard Caton Woodville skyrocketing to fame. Viewers encountered these works in a culture where orality and the spoken word served as a primary medium through which citizens would engage with public and private life. Facility with orality and storytelling was an important skill for Americans in multiple arenas of endeavor, and viewers brought their experiences and expectations to encounters with the visual arts, along with a range of specifically taught viewing behaviors that conditioned how to see and interpret images. Genre paintings, popular illustrations, sculptures, and even ephemera like games and advertisements produced during this time period often relied heavily on narratives to enchant viewers and communicate specific messages. People were accustomed to a paradigm wherein education, politics, private family entertainments, and public displays of art and lectures all revolved around the spoken word and narrative. This dissertation asserts that paintings produced during this period that expressly address the topic of storytelling and speech should be viewed in this context.

Chapter One introduces the subject of the dissertation. Chapter Two addresses why genre paintings in general and images about storytelling in particular rose to such prominence during the middle decades of the nineteenth century. American lives were richly interwoven with orality, and the oral and aural nature of art is approached through two kinds of evidence: 1) speeches made in front of paintings, like the lectures of George Catlin and John Banvard that directly combined spontaneous verbal exposition with display of images, and 2) speech about, in front of, and in criticism of artwork, considering ways in which Americans encountered art in public and private and how dialogue and verbal response played a role in the viewing process. Chapter Three focuses on a single painting, *The Tough Story*, of 1837, by William Sidney Mount, reinserting it into its original historical context of “tough” stories and tall talk. There follows an analysis of the chain of presentations and representations the painting underwent in text and print. Chapter Four argues that the experience of viewing images was a learned practice, and it examines pictures intended for children, which informed youthful viewers’ later roles as citizens and viewers of art. The Rollo books by Jacob Abbott offer evidence of how children learned to identify characters, stories, motivations, and morals in visual productions through the use of visual codes of representation. An in-depth analysis of two paintings by Lilly Martin Spencer and Seymour Joseph Guy—both of whom represented the telling of nursery rhymes—demonstrates how artists attempted to render the process of mental imagining visible for the viewer.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The art of telling stories lies at the heart of a canvas painted by genre artist Lilly Martin Spencer in 1858 (Figure 1). A family of four huddles close in a cozily lit domestic setting, where two girls sit on their father's knees and listen eagerly as he recounts a story. The father's eyes widen, his eyebrows arch, his forehead wrinkles expressively, and his lips purse as words escape in a susurrant of breath: *Fi! Fo! Fum!* These nonsensical sounds—also the title of the painting—ring loudly in the viewer's ears, turning a visual process of *looking* into one of imagined, remembered, or actual *listening*. Perhaps the onlooker even articulates these words aloud, completing them for him- or herself and any fellow viewers. “Fi! Fo! Fum! I smell the blood of an Englishman!” Thus, the painting references the popular cautionary fairy tale Jack and the Beanstalk, instantly evoking details of that story. Even more significantly, it calls to mind a whole range of sensory experiences: the feel of sitting on a parent's lap or hugging a child close, the intimacy of a group embroiled in imagined visions on a dark night, or the sounds of a favorite storyteller's voice. A painting like *Fi! Fo! Fum!* is sentimental, yet it is also a conversation piece, demanding that viewers respond to the humor of the father's absorption and the four different reactions portrayed by the different family members. Do they speak their thoughts aloud, thereby adding another level of orality to the mix? The painting asks the viewer to construct layers of narrative, ranging from a tale of familial closeness to the beanstalk fairy tale.¹ Fundamentally, Spencer paints a story about stories and the

process of telling them, self-consciously posing herself as an authorial presence and providing an opportunity for the critical viewer to think about ways in which narrative works, visually, orally, and textually.

Taking a cue from works such as Spencer's, this dissertation explores such issues of narrative and storytelling as they apply to nineteenth-century art and visual culture, focusing particularly on objects produced between 1830 and 1870. During the decades following the establishment of the National Academy of Design in 1825, artists and patrons struggled to broaden the American art world through the creation of institutions for the display and criticism of art. Genre scenes in particular rose to new prominence for American art audiences, and viewers encountered these works in a culture where orality and the spoken word served as a primary medium through which citizens would engage with public and private life. Facility with orality and storytelling was seen as a national trait, and viewers brought their experiences and expectations to encounters with the visual arts. Genre paintings, popular illustrations, sculptures, and even ephemera like games and advertisements produced during this time period often relied heavily on narratives to enchant viewers and communicate specific messages. People were accustomed to a paradigm wherein education, politics, private family entertainments, and public displays of art and lectures all revolved around the spoken word and narrative. This dissertation asserts that paintings produced during this period that expressly address the topic of storytelling and speech should be viewed in this context. It is easy to oversimplify storytelling images because of their popularity or perceived sentimentality; however, they provide an opportunity for an analysis of narrative and orality as structural forces for making

meaning and communicating ideas, as well as viewers' multiple reactions to visual representations of narratives.

Storytelling works continued to abound in the American art world throughout the middle decades of the century, only giving way to other trends after the Civil War as the beginnings of modernism and a rising interest in art for art's sake and aestheticism began to dominate and storytelling was sidelined more and more to the realm of popular illustration. So too did the political and social atmosphere of the country change greatly between 1830, when popular sovereignty was a novel concept embraced by a newly enfranchised populace and orating politicians, and the 1870s, by which time America's citizenry was vastly more heterogeneous and urban thanks to multiple waves of intense immigration, and politicians relied less on stump speaking and local arenas for voicing their policies.

Anyone who has visited a modern art museum has a deeply embedded notion about what that experience is like, and it generally begins with "don't touch" and ends with "don't talk, and if you must, whisper." This stems from an idea that standing in the presence of artwork calls for reverence. As Alexander Nemerov has described, "The gallery is a place where silence and adoration go together." In a meditative article aimed towards scholars who teach in galleries, Nemerov investigated the difference between the contemplation of a painting in solitude ("that way, the reasoning goes, the interpreter can be alone with his thoughts, and the picture says what it has to say without the static interruption of other people's views") and the benefits that ensue when ideas rise in discussion ("a dialectical attitude about the picture, a give-and-take, that one interpreter might not perceive in the blessed delicate empty-quietness of his venerating mind").² If you've ever taught a discussion seminar

that involved close looking at a painting, you're aware that ideas are expressed in a back-and-forth, dialogic environment in which complicated interpretations are advanced, opinions are expressed, and conclusions reached that might not have occurred in a more solo experience. These discussions enrich our understanding of paintings, but more importantly, of the people who think about paintings in complicated ways and the societies in which they live. Even in this day and age replete with mimetic technology, however, we keep few if any records of these kinds of discussions; I possess no recordings from my classrooms, and only rarely does a museum make any attempt to determine what patrons say about the works on the walls when they think themselves unobserved. How then, might we expect to determine what that experience was like for the nineteenth-century viewer who, if we're lucky, wrote a paragraph or two after the fact about their visit to the picture gallery? My project attempts to get at that ineffable quality, the speech that surrounded works.

This dissertation focuses on understanding viewer involvement with storytelling paintings and the values and meanings that such objects signified in their time period. There are three main subjects for investigation: 1) the American viewer's experience of objects and the propensity to tell stories about and in front of works of art, and how this intersects with other modes of orality in the nineteenth-century;³ 2) storytelling as a process engaged in by the artist, with particular focus on works in which the artist directly engages with this process by painting or drawing stories about telling stories; and 3) the ways in which contemporary viewers would have learned to view such images from theories and practices of artistry and viewership. An analysis of narrative as process, and investigation into the cultural

history of sound and orality as part of the multisensory experience of an artwork, serve as the theoretical underpinnings of this approach.

Ultimately, this dissertation argues that storytelling emerged as a subject for serious artistic representation between 1830 and 1870, when audiences and thinkers clamoring for an “American” art could find in genre paintings a nationalistic expression of the culture as one of storytellers and talkers. It asserts that the viewing process of storytelling paintings was interactive, learned, and multisensory, and that scholars should consider the sounds and silences that historically surrounded images. Pedagogical books for children, descriptive art criticism, and the constant pairing of images with storytelling text trained audiences to look for the story within pictures and engage in a dialogic and often oral process with the speaking characters depicted therein. Through these methods, many Americans became more educated citizens schooled in the codes of social dialogue; they were capable of navigating and finding meanings and morals in an increasingly visual society. This dissertation departs from many other studies by considering the oral and aural resonances of genre paintings and other narrative images between 1830 and 1870, and focusing on how an interest in storytelling as an American trait affected not just the subject matter of images, but also how Americans saw, spoke, and wrote about the visual in general.

This time period saw the rise of genre painting as a popular art, with some of its major practitioners like William Sidney Mount and Richard Caton Woodville skyrocketing to fame. A similar flood of storytelling images poured out for popular consumption as part of the nineteenth-century print revolution: more texts, including illustrated magazines and novels, reached broader audiences with the development of sophisticated distribution networks, a dramatic increase in literacy, and greater

availability of publishing houses and cheap paper.⁴ During this time period, more people were seeing, thinking about, and reading about art in its various forms among a heterogeneous public, and the most popular works available generally involved some sort of narrative.⁵ Recent scholarship has pointed to the rise of the art press, with particular emphasis on the lack of “professionalizing” rhetoric on the part of critics. Prior to about 1870, art criticism involved much more storytelling and description of the works on display, with less critical judgment of formal issues on the part of these writers.⁶ Close reading of published art reviews allows investigation of how this particular brand of narrativizing art criticism, which treated paintings as stories to be told, both relied on the public culture of storytelling and contributed to the ways in which viewers responded to narrative images.

One of the primary questions this dissertation asks is: how did viewers respond to narrative images in the mid-nineteenth century? Art criticism and exhibition reviews played a role in this process, and my research exhibits further evidence of individual response to images, such as diaries, letters, stories written and published about the images, or other images produced as responses. In addition, the rich world of nineteenth-century orality and folklore—yarn-spinning, tale-telling, etc.—offers another area to plumb for evidence of artists’ sources for depiction. Teasing out related issues of visual storytelling also requires asking some theoretical questions: What are the relationships among artist, image, viewer, and critic? How do paintings, illustrations, sculptures, or other objects prompt narrative responses in viewers? How might we theorize the narrative impulse and what is the relationship between image and word during this period? Certain pictorial elements highlight ways in which storytelling becomes a viewer response, as when painted figures engage

in a conversation that must be reconstructed by the viewer. A great many images produced during the mid-nineteenth century do this, catching their characters in the middle of speech. Such paintings are never silent; they prompt imagination and conversation among viewers by asking people to draw on their social experiences.

When analyzing the narrative process, it is also essential to investigate how texts and images interact. Some images are seen as illustrating texts, while other texts illustrate images; even titles assigned to works of art invite or limit speculation. Viewers had to learn to “read” images, resorting to early memories of primers, as well as continual exposure to illustrated books and stories or expert advice and criticism. I consider how we might view the history of publishing, both texts and images, in conjunction with the popularity of storytelling images. Beyond this, nineteenth-century Americans experienced orality in nearly every avenue of their social lives, both ceremonial and mundane, and we must consider the oral experiences of artworks as one among many ways that Americans encountered speech-making and storytelling as cultured citizens.

Structure of the Dissertation

Why did genre paintings in general and images about storytelling in particular rise to such prominence during the middle decades of the nineteenth century? Chapter Two addresses this issue, discussing in more detail the rise of genre paintings as a serious subject for artistic representation in America. It seeks to place genre paintings in context with the boom in the print industry, as well as the increases in technologies of transportation and communication, which allowed for more Americans to see more works of art. Exhibition spaces multiplied and new organizations like the American Art-Union promoted knowledge of art among American citizens. This increase in the

ubiquity of images combined with a desire to produce a genuinely American art and helped to spur artists toward representations of American everyday lives, or at least idealizations of everyday life. America was a place where orality flourished in all arenas of public life, from politics and religion to education and literature, and being a good orator and storyteller was firmly linked to masculine American identity and the national image. The dialect storyteller arose as a common American type, constituents expected politicians to speak and tell stories, and visitors to the country like Alexis de Tocqueville referred to Americans as talkers and speakers. Two kinds of evidence allow an approach to the oral and aural nature of art: 1) speeches made in front of paintings, like the lectures of George Catlin and John Banvard that directly combined spontaneous verbal exposition with display of images, and 2) speech about and in front of artwork, considering ways in which Americans encountered art in public and private and how dialogue and verbal response played a role in the viewing process. Despite the proliferation of images mid-century, even the most sophisticated art viewers still primarily encountered the fine arts through textual descriptions in newspapers and magazines. A survey of nineteenth-century art criticism reveals the roles that storytelling and text played in Americans' conceptions of the visual arts. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the identity of the storyteller as represented in a painting by Woodville and how that role confers authority. Archetypal storytellers presented American history to the public.

After considering storytelling, orality, and narrative in broad strokes, Chapter Three focuses on a single painting, *The Tough Story*, of 1837 by William Sidney Mount. This painting serves as a case study for arguing how artworks could be deeply embedded in the discourses of the time. As I contend, the painting has to be reinserted

back into its historical context, for it has long been known to art historians as *The Long Story* despite its antebellum name. The original title matters: “tough” stories and tall talk were popular modes of self-expression that emphasized orality and the clever self-awareness of storytellers, and they followed particular patterns that allow us to recover some of the original resonances that might have been present for contemporary viewers when seeing this painting. The painting underwent a chain of presentations and representations as it became the subject for multiple stories written and printed to accompany it: first in letters between the artist and the patron, and then in art criticism and popular gift books. The most famous version of Mount’s image was the one written by the “down-east” author Seba Smith, whose character Jack Downing captured the popular imagination; the reprinting of Smith’s story with a different image allows for further investigation of the transformations that time and medium could effect upon a single narrative trope. The larger context of Mount’s body of work and his interest in auralty, music, listening, and mental visualization offer further context for understanding the significance of *The Tough Story*.

Chapter Four argues that the experience of viewing images was a learned practice. The ability to negotiate complicated visual storytelling did not arise spontaneously in a vacuum. Pictures intended and published for children allowed nineteenth-century audiences to first encounter genre images in their youth. How, I ask, did this preparation inform the later roles of these viewers as citizens of a cultural democracy? Pictorial primers and storybooks that paired woodcuts with small narrative texts offer evidence for exploring these issues, combined with a growing interest in theorizing how children learned and the role that images played in the process. Children’s author and educator Jacob Abbott produced a series of books

following the adventures of a young boy named Rollo, and their novel treatment of images provides insight into how children learned to identify characters, stories, motivations, and morals in visual productions. These works simultaneously defined visual codes for representation, teaching viewers from an early age how to interpret images formally. Abbott's books also offer insight into the context of nineteenth-century educational reform and theories of attention and memory. Educators explored new ways that children might encounter objects and pictures, and object lessons urged children to use their senses to describe, categorize, and draw conclusions about objects following logical formulae. When teachers or writers applied these methods to pictures, it resulted in a basic lesson in how to view art and prints. An in-depth analysis of two paintings by Lilly Martin Spencer and Seymour Joseph Guy—both of whom represented the telling of nursery rhymes—demonstrates how artists attempted to render the process of mental imagining visible for the viewer.

Throughout the chapters, this dissertation engages with multiple media across disciplines, including: paintings, engraved illustrations, gift books, newspapers, magazines, games, and toys. This approach enables investigation of the broad issue of narrativity across a wider cross-section of cultural production, rather than confining study to the relatively elite world of fine art painting. In recent generations, scholars have been increasingly willing to broach issues of interdisciplinarity, with focuses on visual and material culture studies, thereby crossing and complicating the traditional division of high and low art and cultural forms.⁷ This dissertation continues this work.

Significance of the Dissertation and Historiography

Fundamentally, this project deals with how viewers see, talk about, and “read” images, an issue relevant to all periods and subfields of art-historical study. Whether

one confronts a twelfth-century figural altarpiece, a fourth-century BCE Greek vase, or a twentieth-century story quilt, each viewer relies upon narrative codes and learned modes for talking about or listening to someone speak about art. With the rise of interest in visual culture studies, this project is also timely. Recent publications highlight the fields of design studies and visual culture, and universities are offering larger classes in visual culture for undergraduate and graduate students. More and more, art historians have interested themselves in the theoretical underpinnings of looking in their consideration of objects and artistic productions, and scholarship references writings by thinkers more traditionally encountered in the study of literature and culture, including Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Pierre Bourdieu, among others. Mieke Bal has influentially examined how signs and semiotics play roles in examining visual art, developing a more complicated way of talking about images.⁸ These changing interests have influenced the development of visual culture theory, elucidated in texts by Nicholas Mirzoeff, John Berger, and Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, among others.⁹ Visual studies scholars generally concern themselves with basic questions of how viewers make meaning, and this project hopes to push this further conceptually by focusing on a historical period of American cultural production.

In recent years scholars have also turned to the history of the senses, examining multisensory experiences of the historical subject, and ranging from studies of vision and smell to sound and touch.¹⁰ As David Howes has argued, “every domain of sensory experience, from the sight of a work of art to the scent of perfume to the savor of dinner, is a field of cultural elaboration.”¹¹ Of particular relevance to this project are studies that have investigated soundscapes as integral parts of historical

and geographical identity.¹² Extending this research further into the realm of art history can prove beneficial. By integrating the study of the visual and the aural, and asking how these senses together signified for nineteenth-century art viewers, my study follows in the footsteps of Leo Mazow and his discussion of painted banjos and their relationships to noise and quietude.¹³ Mazow is one of the first scholars to consider the sonic resonances of the nineteenth-century visual arts, a project that he continued in his important book addressing the works of Thomas Hart Benton in the twentieth century. He argues, “musical imagery was part of a larger belief in the capacity of sound to register and convey meaning.... All that is consequential, or so the artist would have us believe, has both voiced and heard components.” In this well-researched and thorough book, the author focuses on sonic productions by musicians and singers, and then broadens this interest to consider the visual representation of the sounds of speech and technology. His discussion of speakers on the radio is particularly influential for my project, as he considers how Benton’s life-long reputation as a “loud mouth” public speaker influenced his art.¹⁴ Likewise, Asma Naeem has made a case for using one’s aural imagination in front of works of art. Although she focuses largely on musical impressions appearing in art and art created while listening to music, the notion of the aural imagination is useful in the context of my project for understanding the relationships between imagined speech, the representation of a story, and a viewer’s verbalization in front of and about artworks.¹⁵ The following chapters expand on this work and extend it to consider speech, both imagined and actual, moving beyond the realm of non-human noises that sonic historians usually study.

Nineteenth-century genre painting has been a subject of substantial scholarship by historians of American art, especially curators putting together exhibitions. A renaissance of interest in American genre painting occurred in the late 1960s and 1970s, coinciding, notably, with pushes toward American bicentennial celebrations. Hermann Warner Williams, in his *Mirror to the American Past*, pointed to genre painting as a celebration of American national identity and conceptualized the genre painter as a “mirror to his own time” who painted scenes showing how Americans ‘actually’ lived.¹⁶ By suggesting that the artist was a “mirror to his time,” Williams implied a kind of visual objectivity or transparency (which he later claimed is ideal in the genre process), a simple one-to-one reflective process in which the artist shows society an image of itself. He again and again referenced the documentary or recording function of genre painting, marveling at how such images provided information about situations as varied as nineteenth-century country fairs and the evolution of factory labor processes.

Since then, and in contrast, other scholars have focused on the ways in which genre paintings represented constructions rather than “truth.” They have examined specific subjects treated by genre painters, ranging from the American West to rural New England to the domestic sphere, seeking to understand how genre paintings reference, represent, and participate in contemporary larger social and political issues.¹⁷ Revisionist scholars like Elizabeth Johns and Elizabeth O’Leary point to the presence of social types in these paintings, cogently arguing that these artifacts represent attempts at social control of an unwieldy and ever-changing American populace.¹⁸ A number of extremely helpful close studies of single artists also focus heavily on placing their works in context and tend to read genre paintings as

commentary on social and political circumstances.¹⁹ Art historians regularly reference genre paintings when they consider social class, race, gender, regionalism, and other issues of identity; after all, these works do provide insight into how a large percentage of Americans opted to see and classify their worlds (or the worlds of others imagined from a distance). Yet the status of genre paintings as narrative works is often taken for granted, or seen largely as a window onto a social situation.

Only very rarely do scholars focus on how viewers experience the works *as narratives*: asking how, precisely, they signify, and how they might relate to critical and literary culture of the time. One exception is Johns, who does provide an illuminating discussion relating images to phraseology drawn from contemporary political vernacular, and thus argues that the visual structure of a painting's narrative is informed by linguistic constructs learned through social experience.²⁰ My project, however, seeks to go further back in this process of signification, looking not just at the social meanings assigned to narrative, but the ways in which artists and viewers visually constructed narratives on the canvas or page in the first place.

Nemerov's analysis of works by N. C. Wyeth suggests a useful methodological model for this dissertation. In an article dealing with illustrations of children's stories, Nemerov likens the visual image itself to the process of reading, seeing the conventions of Brandywine illustrators as representing the imagination and calling on the viewer to consider the internal visualizations that reading inspires. He addresses the development of film and sound recording technologies as usurping "the book's traditional role as the provider of powerful hallucinations of absent entities;" for him, new film and sound technologies replace the something *other* that reading provided.²¹ I too seek to determine conventions by which narratives and texts are visualized, yet I

am interested to learn how, even before the development of recorded sound, texts and images might have been accompanied by an auditory component, whether it involved simply reading aloud, or discussing what was seen or imagined.

The following case studies and examination of storytelling and orality in conjunction with American nineteenth-century visual culture can provide additional insight into the ways that viewers might have interacted with genre painting not only in America, but also in Europe. Although this dissertation argues that Americans made a case for themselves as a particularly oral culture of storytellers and talkers, they were hardly alone in valuing this mode of interacting with each other and visual objects. European genre painting, which was so influential for Americans collecting and seeing such scenes both at home and abroad, had a much longer history of combining visual storytelling with verbal and oral interest. Studies of European genre painting might therefore also benefit from a reevaluation of the ways artists constructed both aural and visual stories for viewers. Venues for viewing art—whether in public or in the home—can be seen as spaces for both speech and silence, where talk and storytelling and criticism about those works afford them a lively cultural presence. Thomas Crow has discussed the physical and social environment of the Salon exhibitions in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Paris, yet while his source materials address the clamor and noise that attended such displays (as Pidansot de Mairobert wrote of the experience of entering an exhibition, in 1777, “Finally you are deafened by a continuous noise like that of the crashing waves in an angry sea”), more attention could be paid to how the sonic effects of this experience changed the ways people thought and spoke about art.²² Svetlana Alpers has influentially discussed ekphrasis in Dutch art, contrasting the Dutch preoccupation

with description with the iconographical and emblematic approaches so often taken by modern art historians. Her analysis of genre painting as ekphrastic and descriptive provide a useful comparison for the subject matter treated in this dissertation.²³

Narrative has been treated at length as an issue when considering other fields of art history, particularly ancient or Renaissance art. Jocelyn Penny Small investigated the phenomenon of hierarchical time in her analysis of narrative in ancient Greek pottery, sculpture, and painting. The subject has been further elucidated by Mark Stansbury-O'Donnell, who thoroughly examined the structure, viewing process, and viewing contexts for ancient Greek narrative art, as well as by Luca Giuliani and Joseph O'Donnell, who studied the relationships between images and texts in a culture moving from "oraliture" to literature. Scholars of Renaissance art have treated the subject just as thoroughly. Jules Lubbock focused on the portrayal of major biblical events, arguing that artists approached conventional scenes as thoughtful interpreters, considering how narrative construction was affected by the ways in which viewers would physically see images. Perhaps the most thoroughly investigated subject is that of *ut pictura poesis*, a theorization of the relationship between image and text that dominated among Renaissance scholars who found the sentiment in Horace's *Ars Poetica*, and which was influentially discussed by Rensselaer W. Lee.²⁴

Narrative is useful as a theoretical framework in the consideration of American subjects.²⁵ Nineteenth-century genre painting and prints invite this critical approach: the narrative focus and evocative elements within the artworks ask the viewer to draw upon his or her own experiences to construct stories that match the circumstances depicted. Furthermore, in the mid-nineteenth century, connections between stories

and telling continually intrigued popular authors. For example, Washington Irving's popular short story "Rip Van Winkle" referenced oral tradition, posing as a text deriving from the "historical researches" into the "legendary lore, so invaluable to true history" of the late Diedrich Knickerbocker; within the story, Van Winkle is himself most renowned in his village for telling children "long stories of ghosts, witches, and Indians."²⁶

My goal in this dissertation is not only to shed new light on familiar genre paintings, such as those by William Sidney Mount and Lilly Martin Spencer, in part by deploying evidence garnered from less well-known objects of print culture. Rather, the project draws attention to the ways in which genre paintings can serve as self-conscious meditations upon artistic practice. They are far from "simple" stories in paint. Rather, they highlight an interest in storytelling as an element of national identity, while showcasing the ways in which viewers learned to derive and make meaning. The intersections of art and literature, of high culture and popular culture, and of permanent object and ephemeral discussion provide avenues for new considerations of the operation of one of the most basic functions of artistic production, the representation of a story.

ENDNOTES

¹ Contextual interpretations add different nuances to the work; by placing the painting specifically within the historical moment in which it was produced, David Lubin has suggested that the work provides larger economic allegories relating the children's anxiety to the risk-taking behind the Panic of 1857. David M. Lubin, *Picturing a Nation: Art and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

² Alexander Nemerov, "The Pleasure of Conversation," *Yale University Art Gallery Bulletin* (2003): 43.

³ This historical viewer is difficult to recover, and of course must be "ideal" in some sense based on a by-no-means comprehensive sampling of historical responses to artworks and prescriptions by critics and thinkers for looking at art. Audiences for art were broadening throughout the nineteenth-century geographically, economically, and socially due to a multitude of factors, including advancements in the print industry, the establishment of more institutions and publications seeking to bring art to more audiences, and advancements in transportation that allowed for art to travel more places and be seen more cheaply by more people. The fact remains, however, that paintings in particular were largely viewed by white, middle-class and upper-class viewers of both genders. Additionally, scholars must rely on written records of viewers' oral responses to artworks, and such documents were largely produced, and just as importantly saved, by these same audiences.

⁴ See Cathy N. Davidson, *Reading in America: Literature and Social History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); Barbara Ryan and Amy M. Thomas, *Reading Acts: U.S. Readers' Interactions with Literature, 1800-1950* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2002); Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); David Morgan, *Protestants and Pictures: Religion, Visual Culture, and the Age of American Mass Production* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 14-19.

⁵ Thomas Crow has addressed many of the issues that arise from encounters between works produced by artists and the "public" that viewed them in the increasingly well attended Parisian salons of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, where

criticism was controversial and new viewing audiences presented problems and opportunities for artists. He discusses how fraught the notion of a “public” was for artists who were used to relying on hierarchical culture and aristocratic patronage, and who through the institution of the Salon were for the first time suddenly just as bound to acknowledge and address democratic reception. Critics and artists at the time (especially academicians) complained that there was no such thing as a homogenous public among such a heterogeneous conglomeration of humanity as those who attended the salon. Crow quotes the academic painter Coypel, who described “a simple public at certain times, a prejudiced public, a flighty public, an envious public, a public slavish to fashion, which in order to judge wants to see everything and examine nothing.” Coypel goes on to distinguish “a true public” of artistic viewers in the know from “the mob,” which smothers that public’s voice with fickle intensity. Thomas E. Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 10. Crow’s introduction discusses this topic cogently and usefully.

⁶ J. M. Mancini, *Pre-Modernism: Art-World Change and American Culture from the Civil War to the Armory Show* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), and David B. Dearing and Avis Berman, *Rave Reviews: American Art and Its Critics, 1826-1925* (New York: National Academy of Design, 2000).

⁷ Lawrence Levine has examined this divide between high and low culture, pointing out the fact that boundaries were much more fluid during the nineteenth century and using the example of William Shakespeare in America as an example. Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988). Countless scholars have taken up the challenge of incorporating studies of objects from mass and popular culture into their examination of the so-called fine arts in the intervening years, while others have devoted serious academic study to those objects themselves. Just a few examples include Jo-Ann Morgan, “Mammy the Huckster: Selling the Old South for the New Century,” *American Art* 9, no. 1 (1995): 86-109; Morgan, *Protestants and Pictures*; Michael Leja, *Looking Askance: Skepticism and American Art from Eakins to Duchamp* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Wendy Bellion, *Citizen Spectator: Art, Illusion, and Visual Perception in Early National America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); and Leo G. Mazow and Sarah Burns, *Picturing the Banjo* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005).

⁸ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972); Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, translated by A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972); Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,

1984); Mieke Bal, "Seeing Signs: The Use of Semiotics for the Understanding of Visual Art," in *The Subjects of Art History: Historical Objects in Contemporary Perspective*, edited by Mark A. Cheetham, Michael Ann Holly, and Keith Moxey, 74-93 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, "Semiotics and Art History," *Art Bulletin* 73 (1991): 174-208; and W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Text, Image, Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

⁹Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall, *Visual Culture: The Reader* (London: SAGE Publications, 1999); Nicholas Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009); Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Visual Culture Reader* (London: Routledge, 1998); Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials*, 2nd ed. (London: SAGE Publications, 2007); Vanessa R. Schwartz and Jeannene M. Przyblyski, *The Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); and John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972).

¹⁰ Constance Classen, David Howes, and Anthony Synnott, *Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell* (London: Routledge, 1994); David Howes, *Sensual Relations: Engaging the Senses in Culture and Social Theory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003); Constance Classen, *The Book of Touch* (Oxford: Berg, 2005); and Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966).

¹¹ Howes, *Sensual Relations*, xi.

¹² Richard Cullen Rath, "Hearing American History," *The Journal of American History* 95, no. 2 (2008): 417-431; and Mark M. Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001). Smith's book differentiates the soundscapes of the north and south before the Civil War, arguing that this aural sectionalism played a part in causing the divisions leading up to the war. He begins his book with the tale of South Carolinian Angelina Grimke, an abolitionist who appealed to her Massachusetts legislature listeners in 1838 by evoking the sounds of the south (cries of slaves, the sound of the lash, clanking chains). Interestingly, he never mentions the importance of the sounds of speech: mightn't the rolling southern accent of Grimke have played an integral role in her address to her Bostonian audience? For historical considerations of speech, orality, and literacy, the key work is Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1982).

¹³ Mazow and Burns, *Picturing the Banjo*. In his contribution to this catalog, “From Sonic to Social: Noise, Quiet, and Nineteenth-Century American Banjo Imagery,” Mazow posits that we should think of the “noise” or “quietude” associated with banjo playing. He argues that images of banjo playing in the late 19th c. evoke thoughts of noise controlled or redirected from the cacophonous “noise” of slave celebrations that were legally regulated on plantations for fear of rebellion, removing early African associations of the banjo’s predecessor, the bandore. He argues that by quieting these images by placing individuals in static positions, evoking quietude with effects of light and color, and associating them with tamed animals, the paintings function as motifs of social tranquility.

¹⁴ Leo G. Mazow, *Thomas Hart Benton and the American Sound* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 4.

¹⁵ Asma Naeem, “The Aural Imagination,” *American Art* 24:3 (2010), 14-17; and Idem, “‘The Imagery of the Ear’: Listening and Sound in American Art, 1847-1897,” Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, 2010.

¹⁶ Hermann Warner Williams, *Mirror to the American Past; a Survey of American Genre Painting: 1750-1900* (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1973).

¹⁷ William H. Truettner and Nancy K. Anderson, *The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820-1920* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991); Lee M. Edwards, Jan Seidler Ramirez, and Timothy Anglin Burgard, *Domestic Bliss: Family Life in American Painting, 1840-1910* (Yonkers, NY: Hudson River Museum, 1986); and William H. Truettner and Roger B. Stein, *Picturing Old New England: Image and Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

¹⁸ Elizabeth Johns, *American Genre Painting: The Politics of Everyday Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991); and Elizabeth L. O’Leary, *At Beck and Call: The Representation of Domestic Servants in Nineteenth-Century American Painting* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996).

¹⁹ Robin Bolton-Smith, *Lilly Martin Spencer, 1822-1902: The Joys of Sentiment* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1973); Henry Nichols Blake Clark, *Francis W. Edmonds, American Master in the Dutch Tradition* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988); Alfred Frankenstein, *William Sidney Mount* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1975); and Justin P. Wolff, *Richard Caton Woodville: American Painter, Artful Dodger* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002).

²⁰ Johns, *American Genre Painting*, 39-53.

²¹ Alexander Nemerov, "The Boy in Bed: The Scene of Reading in N. C. Wyeth's Wreck of the 'Covenant'," *The Art Bulletin* 88, no. 1 (2006): 7-27.

²² Crow, *Painters and Public Life*, 4. A huge amount of excellent scholarship has addressed genre painting in Europe. Just a few extremely useful recent sources include: Wayne E. Franits, *Dutch Seventeenth-Century Genre Painting: Its Stylistic and Thematic Evolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Philip Conisbee, Ed., *French Genre Painting in the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Junko Aono, *Confronting the Golden Age: Imitation and Innovation in Dutch Genre Painting, 1680-1750* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015); Ruth Bernard Yeazell, *Art of the Everyday: Dutch Painting and the Realist Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Wayne E. Franits, *Looking at Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art: Realism Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Robin Adele Greeley, "Chardin, Time and Mastery," *Word & Image* 19, no. 4 (2003): 281-295; and Susan Sidlauskas, "Resisting Narrative: The Problem of Edgar Degas's Interior," *Art Bulletin* 75 (1993): 671-696.

²³ Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983). Ekphrasis provides an interesting theoretical topic for consideration, and it has been addressed by a number of scholars, including: Lesley Stevenson, "Sister Arts or Sibling Rivalry? Cezanne and the Logic of the Senses," *Word and Image* 24, no. 2 (2008): 152-161; Jas Elsner, "Art History as Ekphrasis," *Art History* 33, no. 1 (2010): 10-27; James A. W. Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); and Stephen Cheeke, *Writing for Art: The Aesthetics of Ekphrasis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008).

²⁴ Jocelyn Penny Small, "Time in Space: Narrative in Classical Art," *The Art Bulletin* 81, no. 4 (1999): 562-575; Mark Stansbury-O'Donnell, *Pictorial Narrative in Ancient Greek Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Luca Giuliani and Joseph O'Donnell, *Image and Myth: A History of Pictorial Narration in Greek Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Jules Lubbock, *Storytelling in Christian Art from Giotto to Donatello* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); Suzanne Lewis, *Reading Images: Narrative Discourse and Reception in the Thirteenth-Century Illuminated Apocalypse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and Rensselaer W. Lee, *Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967). See also W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), for a discussion of the transformation of ut pictura poesis in relationship to abstract painting, which he terms ut pictura theoria.

²⁵ Many scholars have focused on narrative American paintings, most often gathering them into informative exhibitions, yet they only occasionally address precisely how narrative worked in the images. Barbara Dayer Gallati, Linda S. Ferber, Ella M. Foshay, and Kimberly Orcutt, *Making American Taste: Narrative Art for a New Democracy* (New York: New-York Historical Society, 2011); Susan Danly, *Telling Tales: Nineteenth-Century Narrative Painting from the Collection of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts* (New York: American Federation of Arts, 1991); and Charles C. Eldredge and Tom Butler, *Tales from the Easel: American Narrative Paintings from Southeastern Museums, Circa 1800-1950* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004).

²⁶ Washington Irving, *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*, edited by Susan Manning (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

Chapter 2

TALKING PICTURES: VOICE AND IMAGE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA

The True American (Figure 2), a painting by Enoch Wood Perry, may seem like an odd place to begin a discussion of storytelling in nineteenth-century American art. Despite possessing many characteristics that render it typical of the kinds of genre paintings produced by American artists in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, *The True American* eliminates some of the key elements that viewers of this type of painting, both historically and today, tend to demand: namely interaction among the characters, telling facial expressions, and a space of lively debate and action. In a very interesting way, the image at once stages and stymies storytelling.¹

The scene itself is curious and strange. In this small painting (approximately 12 by 16 inches) five men, a boy, and a dog sit or stand in the shallow, stage-like space created by the front porch of a building. The viewer can read this location as a generic “National Hotel” by extrapolation from the letters on the sign over the door. The figures contort themselves into a variety of poses. They lean across the sill of an open window or lounge sideways upon a chair with a cigar in hand. One man straddles a chair as he hunches forward over its back, and another balances precariously in a tipped-back seat with his feet crossed on the railing in front of him while he reads a newspaper entitled *The True American*, its title prominently displayed. A third man casually rests one bent leg upon a knee propped up on the rung of his chair. A boy sprawls on the wooden planks of the porch’s unfinished floor at the far right while stroking the back of his dog, and a shadowy figure descends the

interior staircase at the far left, visible through the building's open door. The scene might almost be a formal exercise in figure placement and management of space, exhibiting the many angles and variations that a man's body might assume, and exploring the interaction of light, shadow, and foreshortening caused by the positioning of the chairs and porch rails. However, the viewer cannot escape one glaring and extremely peculiar characteristic shared by all the figures in the painting, even the dog and the horse on the notice tacked up to the front of the hotel. No one has a head!

Using a variety of devices, the artist has worked quite hard to remove the heads from all the characters in the painting. This unnatural state of affairs is emphasized by the carefully positioned porch railing, which slices across the necks of four of the men, placing yet another visual barrier between viewer and subject.² By removing the heads of all the characters, Perry has created an oddly silent composition. No one speaks to anyone else. No one visibly interacts except in concealment (whispering behind the newspaper, eavesdropping inside the window?). No facial expressions provide us clues as to mood, attitude, conflict, or relationships. The men are mute, mouthless and voiceless, and deaf with no ears to hear each other. They are literally dumb to any social or political discourse that might spring from consideration of the news contained in the paper, and they have nothing to say in order to contribute to their society. In any other work, one might imagine such a scene on a country porch as being filled with dialogue and dialect, as the newspaper is read aloud, the subject of gossip and vocal reaction, listening and interaction.

As a point of contrast, one can compare *The True American* to a much more popular and well-studied depiction of a similar event, the reading of a paper in a

comparable setting completed around the same time: namely, Richard Caton Woodville's *War News from Mexico* (1848) (Figure 3). Perry and Woodville both lived and studied in Düsseldorf, Germany, where the academy prized such narrative genre paintings. Woodville's picture is an altogether more raucous affair. This shallow porch also contains an amalgamation of people gathered in front of a rural hotel, this time labeled as "American Hotel" on its sign, and one reads a newspaper. However, here the included people squeeze together cheek by jowl, and all respond to the key event as the central figure reads from a tightly grasped newspaper, his mouth gaping almost absurdly wide as he gasps in astonishment. Two men crane their heads over his shoulder to peek at the paper for corroboration of what they are hearing, and the second man from the left leans in, not looking at the paper but rather with his eyes affixed on nothing, his head tilted just so in a listening posture. The bespectacled figure to the right of the reader bends down to repeat the news into the ear of an older man, his hand poised to catch and magnify his speech. All eyes and ears fixate on the center of attention, the newspaper, and just as significantly, the discussion surrounding that newspaper and the story it contains. The man to the right of the central reader even exuberantly shouts his excitement as he flings his cap above him in celebration. Unlike the silenced figures in *The True American*, this painting is rich with noise, as men speak and whisper, holler and jostle themselves closer. Here some figures are almost nothing but heads, like the woman who leans out the window (but not into the main gathering) and the man peeking out from behind the column next to her, and each bears an individual reaction and character, prompting the viewer to judge the included figures based on age, social class, and relationship. As Bryan Wolf has argued, "what is valued is not the news itself but its effect on those who receive it" as

“Woodville converts the informational status of the news media into an older form of storytelling rooted in the private lives of the individuals involved.”³ Justin Wolff points to the painting in similar fashion as a meeting between the impersonal, modern newspaper and the personal storytelling of the whispering figure. For him, the central figure monopolizes the news because he reads it; “he can choose what portions to paraphrase or omit and whether to alter the tone and pitch of his voice as he reads,” and the old man’s news is filtered again through his interpreter’s speech, as part of “the struggle of individuals to conform to the new voice of journalism.”⁴

None of this active response to the news goes on in *The True American*. Instead, in this picture the newspaper operates as the isolating influence that some feared it might become. Heads are literally buried in the newspaper, which becomes a device for hiding. It delivers its news directly to only one user, who in his solitude despite the crowd lives in the fearsome world of too much information described by Walter Benjamin, where the newspaper like the novel creates “the solitary individual, who is no longer able to express himself by giving examples of his most important concerns, is himself uncounseled, and cannot counsel others.”⁵ It is the discussion that is embedded in storytelling, the counsel that men offer each other through experience, which is lacking in the silence of *The True American*.

War News from Mexico has long interested viewers because at its heart it presents a scene of storytelling in action, as news is disseminated, discussed, and repeated, and conversations are depicted for the viewer to see and imagine. The different social, gender, and racial backgrounds of the participants invite assumptions about their interactions and what the artist might be saying about their society, and the inclusion of small details—like the match held over the powder-keg—provides

narrative clues evoking the viewer's desire to make sense and interpret. Despite its status as a theoretically silent visual object, here sound, speech, and voice are central characters in the scene. Like most of the genre paintings that became so popular during the mid-nineteenth century, storytelling is a key element, and the image provides multivalent levels of voice, ranging from the paper itself to its reading-aloud, its repetition and the implied commentary, reactions, and discussions among the other characters and the viewers of those characters.

In this chapter, I examine the surge of paintings engaging in and about storytelling between 1830 and 1870 in an attempt to answer the question of why it might be intriguing subject matter for viewers at the time. Why did genre painting rise to such prominence when it did, and in particular, why did storytelling and orality become such popular subjects for artistic representation? This change hinges upon the increasing desire for an American art to represent the newly more democratic nation, paired with an inextricable linkage between American identity and American talk, orality, and storytelling, which permeated the increasingly visual world as well. Storytelling and orality increasingly interested nineteenth-century Americans. Citizens encountered storytelling in the fields of politics, education, religion, and art. As more images became available to the American public through increases in exhibition venues and print technologies, it became increasingly important to develop a way to negotiate these images. Storytelling served that function. As this Chapter elucidates, exhibits paired paintings with lectures and stories, images appeared side-by-side with stories in the popular press, and "viewers" who had never seen so many of the artworks discussed in newspaper and magazine reviews still encountered them in the form of short, storytelling textual descriptions. During this time period, painting

and storytelling were inextricably intertwined for American audiences, and viewing images also meant hearing, talking, and writing about them.

The Rise of Genre Painting

As many scholars have pointed out, beginning around 1830, there was a new flourishing of genre painting among American artists working for patrons and public exhibition alike.⁶ Painters who specialized in the subject included well-studied artists like William Sidney Mount, George Caleb Bingham, Lilly Martin Spencer, Richard Caton Woodville, and Francis Edmonds, as well as a host of less well-known but still prolific artists and engravers. The subject matter of these popular paintings derived from the American scene, topics familiar from family life and literature, showcasing American types in humorous or sentimental situations. Bruce Robertson has argued that “intended as they were for a larger public audience, most of their compositions are explicitly readable, often from left to right, with actors whose gestures are both broad and distinct. Ambiguity, if present at all, is usually deliberate, with its meaning easily accessible rather than requiring deep learning or searching. The painting styles are generally precise and full of detail—resulting in comfortable, middle-class images that virtually all cultured Americans confessed to favoring.”⁷

At the heart of this renewed production of genre painting between 1830 and 1870 lies a fundamental interest in storytelling and orality. Many works include storytelling or speaking gestures to draw one’s attention to the dialogue occurring therein. Men lift hands to emphasize rhetorical points, others cup their ears to facilitate hearing or tilt their heads to catch a phrase, and mouths gape open as speech issues forth. Images of storytelling tend to place one figure, the storyteller, in a position of visual prominence, as the focalizing gazes of his listeners arrow in on his

position. He usually sits in a comfortable pose as he delivers his long tale. Thus in William Ranney's painting *Advice on the Prairie* (Figure 4), as a pioneer family huddles about their covered wagon, they attentively watch and listen to a mountain man, dressed evocatively in rough leathers with a rifle braced between his thighs, as he raises his hand in a descriptive gesture. He is perhaps providing expert advice, as the title cues us to expect, or telling a marvelous story of his adventures for his listeners. Although this painting falls into the category of western scenes that thrilled American audiences back east with little access to the kind of adventure and scenery depicted, it is the storytelling that lies at its center.⁸

Genre paintings showcasing storytelling relied on a few well-established codes to indicate to viewers the moment of oratorical expostulation occurring in the painted work before them. Generally these compositions included more than one listener, clustered about and centering their focalizing gazes upon the storyteller, and thus providing an audience, rather than simply another participant in a dialogue. While not necessarily at the center of the painting, the storyteller is nevertheless the center of attention in the composition. In *Advice on the Prairie*, although he forms a part of the circle of people who group about him to hear his story, the mountain man storyteller is nevertheless set apart in ways that draw the viewer's attention. His rough leather clothes and hunting rifle distinguish his appearance from the more conventional dress of his listeners, and while they cluster together, interacting with and touching each other, he is seated at somewhat of a remove, with his back placed towards the wilderness out of which he came. The smoke curls up behind him, rather unnaturally from such a small fire that has not just been doused with water, as if providing a screen upon which visions of the story might be projected.⁹ He is the focus of

everyone's eyes, with young and old alike watching him as he expounds upon his tale. In these conventions, listening usually also includes an element of looking, and vision of the storyteller was as significant as auditory receptiveness. Most significantly, he hunches forward and extends his arm in a storytelling gesture, as if painting a picture before him in the space between speaker and listeners, space almost always left open as if providing room for the other main element of these works: speech itself. This is the key way that artists signaled the occurrence of storytelling and oration in their paintings, and it occurs again and again in American genre paintings from this period. Speakers extend their arms forward and up and down, count off points on their fingers, or point to objects or events actual or imagined.

The body language that accompanied speaking and listening was so important to viewers that manuals codified it quite carefully, and aspiring artists, actors, and orators turned to such books to learn ways to communicate their ideas, as of course did audiences for all these modes of presentation. Artists had long looked to books filled with labeled drawings exhibiting how to represent certain emotions or actions through facial expressions and gestures, like the French artist Charles Lebrun's famous 1734 work, *A Method to Learn to Design the Passions*. In the nineteenth century, publishers put forth a number of works that included specific focus on ways to represent oratory and discussion. For instance, in 1822 English actor and theatrical manager Henry Siddons published *Practical Illustrations of Rhetorical Gesture and Action; Adapted to the English Drama*, which included 4 plates labeled "Indifference," "Expectation," "Excited Interest," and "Gratification" (Figure 5). In these four images, one man reads aloud while a second begins by ignoring his speech and then gradually and almost farcically moves closer and closer as he becomes absorbed in the

details of the words being said. Such books traditionally paid much more attention to the gestures of speech than those of listening. Oratory was a subject codified in great detail and studied in schools, and textbooks devoted to the practice paid as much attention to the look of the speaker as they did to his words. *Sanders' School Speaker: A Comprehensive Course of Instruction in the Principles of Oratory; with Numerous Exercises for Practice in Declamation* made it clear that there wasn't merely one speaking gesture (Figures 6-9). It included images illustrating sixteen different poses a speaker might adopt to represent various attitudes as his oration waxed and waned in emotional tenor, ranging dramatically from "rapturous delight" and "joyful surprise" to "aversion" and "sudden terror." The depicted speaker changes the positioning of his hands, arms, and head, and even the direction of his gaze, as he presents these different discourses to his listeners. Fig. 4 in his series, which "represents the speaker as simply making a declaration, or describing an event," exhibits the gesture most familiar to viewers of storytelling genre paintings, which could after all only choose one attitude from among such a plenty.¹⁰

Again and again, paintings present viewers with scenes that center on the interchange of speaking and listening between several central figures. In *Country Politician* of 1849 (Figure 10), George Caleb Bingham has seated three men around a stove in a country tavern, and two listen as one raises his hands to tick off his points on his fingers.¹¹ Francis Edmonds likewise convenes two such conversational groupings in *The Image Pedlar* of 1844 (Figure 11). On the left, a grandfather gestures to a bust of George Washington while bending down and speaking to his young grandson; in counterpoint, an image peddler holds out a cheap sculpture of a bowl of fruit for the women of the family to examine. Edmonds provides us with two

views of speech and storytelling in action, and, more specifically, two kinds of conversations about objects of art.¹²

Art objects function as nexus points in this painting, drawing attention and providing focal points for stories and dialogue. After viewing Edmonds' work, author and artist Charles Lanman wrote an evaluation of what he had seen, highlighting Edmonds' strengths and his own ideas about what it meant to see and experience a picture of this sort: "They are of a comical character, and never fail to tell their story at a single glance. They are always intended to make you laugh, and are, therefore, agreeable helpers on to a long life; and sometimes possess an undercurrent of poetry or philosophy, which makes them voiceless preachers to the thinking man."¹³ He pointed to the storytelling nature of the paintings, which are above all communicators, "voiceless preachers." Another critic described Jerome Thompson's paintings in an 1857 review, claiming that he produced "pictures which literally talk with reminiscences and life." It is clear that for some viewers at least, paintings were not only about speech but could be construed as speaking objects in their own right.¹⁴

A New Art for a New America

For a long time, scholars of American art, influenced by modernism's anti-narrative bias, turned to the typical explanation that many American viewers were too naïve to like anything better than narrative painting, as if storytelling were inferior and their admiration for it rendered them unsophisticated viewers. In 1956, E. P. Richardson wrote of American genre paintings, "Easy, skillful, charming, sentimental, they were over-rated in their own lifetime and forgotten today when 'story telling' is wholly out of fashion."¹⁵ Others have pointed to the sentimentality of mid-nineteenth century painting, deriding pictures that focus on storytelling as overly emotional and

uncritical works, or ridiculing these works as dreaded pandering to the masses. Scholars have done a great deal of work to move past these notions, which are too dismissive, insulting the intelligence of the many artists, critics, viewers, and readers who did approach imagery by valuing its ability to tell good stories. Even the notable art patron Luman Reed explained in a letter to William Sidney Mount, “Really every day Scenes where the picture tells the story are the kinds most pleasing to me and must be to every true lover of the Art.”¹⁶ Robin Bolton-Smith and Darlene Marshall have both worked to excavate the value of sentimentalism, arguing that every age possesses its own variety of sentimentality that must be historically situated. Marshall points out that sentimentality was a device that could be used to control anxieties about a quickly changing society, while making women in particular responsible for the moral and ethical development of the culture within their social spheres.¹⁷

Anxieties abounded in mid-nineteenth-century America, as society was quickly changing under the force of rapid social development. The much-vaunted period termed Jacksonian democracy, lasting from roughly 1828 when Andrew Jackson was elected president until just prior to the Civil War, brought with it many political and social changes, as sovereignty was extended beyond the educated, landed classes and given to a much wider population (excepting slaves and women and native Americans, of course). Although life didn’t always live up to the espoused ideals, America was supposedly even more founded upon equality than ever before, yet this brought with it rising anxieties about the types of people who were being accorded this kind of political and social power. Urbanization, immigration, and the shift from agrarianism to a factory work system all played roles in changing the face of the American populace.¹⁸

Elizabeth Johns has influentially and convincingly posited that genre painting flourishes especially at those moments when economic changes yield a shift in social hierarchies, as newly powerful groups try to cement their positions. Genre paintings relied on the production of popular types, like the yeoman farmer, the Yankee, the Southwesterner, the frontiersman, the black, women, urban working class figures, etc., as a way to express anxieties felt about the new heterogeneity of the citizenry, particularly by elites. According to Johns, the ability to laugh at or carefully categorize people rendered such differences safer.¹⁹

Although a negative reaction to anxiety can provide one plausible explanation for the rise of genre painting in America, other factors were at play as well. Changing politics and increased travel between Europe and America also led to a desire to project a national image of the United States, create a national story, and present an image of a civilized America. This is perhaps the motivation most frequently cited in secondary literature about genre painting in America, that there is something fundamentally American about how it operates. Barbara Weinberg has argued that after 1830, nearly all stories related to the question: “What is America? Who is an American?”²⁰ Milton Brown discussed genre painting as “strongly motivated by the contemporary desire for a readily identifiable American subject matter in art,” and Edward Nygren claimed, “If landscape painting made manifest the physical potential of America, genre championed the wholesome virtues of its population and the benefits of its democratic system.”²¹

National boosterism was certainly a force for change within American culture in general and the art world in particular. For instance, the Young America movement, which arose in 1845, comprised a group of youthful journalists who

promoted American culture and democracy; they championed clear, coherent art that did not deceive and portrayed pedestrian and matter-of-fact subject matter. The Young American journal *Democratic Review* praised Mount and other genre painters as “honestly national” because of their attention to “the camp meeting, the negro music, the auctioneers and orators, and fashionable clergy, life on the Mississippi and the Lakes, the history of every man’s life, his shifts and expedients, and change of pursuits, newspaper controversies, fashions in dress, military trainings, public lectures, newspaper advertisements, placards, signs, names of children, man worship, razor-strop men,” concluding, “So far from being a dull people, we are eminently cheerful.”²² For the Young Americans, American art was an extension of egalitarian democracy.

Even for their conservative Whig political opponents, art was a patriotic, national concern, although Whigs saw American art as an act of stewardship and a form of cultural authority. Whig cultural elites viewed art and its institutions as a way to educate and uplift the American body politic, to get people to go beyond economic divisions and self-serving decisions and to think of themselves as part of a community of “mutual intercourse,” a very old Whig way of thinking, based in classical republican ideologies of the eighteenth century and earlier.²³ Perhaps the most famous author of women’s advice literature of the time, Catherine Beecher, wrote in 1841, “The success of democratic institutions, as is conceded by all, depends upon the intellectual and moral character of the mass of the people. If they are intelligent and virtuous, democracy is a blessing; but if they are ignorant and wicked, it is only a curse, and as much more dreadful than any other form of civil government, as a thousand tyrants are more to be dreaded than one.”²⁴ Beecher famously asserted that

women affected the character of the nation by educating its youth, but the elevation of public taste (and therefore morals) through art was a commonly held principle in the nineteenth century.²⁵ Ralph Waldo Emerson, too, turned to genre subjects for inspiration, delivering a Phi Beta Kappa address in 1837 at Harvard College in which he exhorted audiences: “The literature of the poor, the feelings of the child, the philosophy of the street, the meaning of household life, are the topics of the time. It is a great stride. It is a sign—is it not?—of new vigor.... I ask not for the great, the remote, the romantic...I embrace the common, I explore and sit at the feet of the familiar, the low.”²⁶

Ironically, this national American boosterism must be viewed in combination with a greater exposure to European genre paintings, particularly those by the Dutch masters and British artist David Wilkie, whose works were readily available in America as popular prints. Mount made very public the fact that he had never chosen to leave America to study art in Europe, yet he was known as the “American Wilkie,” and he expressed deep admiration for Teniers as a colorist and advocated painting outdoors like Teniers did.²⁷ Other American artists and collectors had a great deal more exposure than this. Gilmor, a Baltimore patron of both Mount and Woodville, possessed one of the most impressive collections of Dutch art in the nation, and he invited young artists to visit it, treating it as a school for those unable to travel to Europe. Gilmor himself studied in Amsterdam, where he wrote in his journal, “I am become so great a Connoisseur, that I can instantly on entering a room point out even from the door all the principal pictures.”²⁸ He collected hundreds of paintings from American and English dealers, and his inventories recorded approximately 150 Dutch and Flemish paintings. Woodville at least would likely have seen Gilmor’s collection

in person while he was studying with the Baltimore artist Alfred Jacob Miller.²⁹ Woodville later traveled to Germany to study at the Düsseldorf Academy, the most prestigious art school in Germany in the early nineteenth century, which taught four popular modes of painting, including history, landscape, “romantic-poetic,” and genre painting. Other American genre painters who studied there included Emmanuel Leutze, Worthington Whittredge, Eastman Johnson, and Enoch Wood Perry. For those who couldn’t scrape up the cash to travel to Europe, the Düsseldorf Gallery opened in 1848 in New York City and was on show until the early 1860s. Its exhibitions included approximately 150 paintings by German artists, mostly landscapes and genre paintings owned by the German consul in New York, John G. Boker.³⁰

A World of Images

To further explain the rise of genre painting in America, we must look to other visual media as well. As Peter C. Marzio has argued, in many ways graphic art led the way in genre painting, not the other way around.³¹ Prints and woodcuts were available in the eighteenth century, and both small and large format images reached American audiences as large political prints, illustrations in children’s primers and storybooks, bookplates, maps, and advertisements, among other types.³² However, during the nineteenth century, technological developments rapidly expanded the printing industries, rendering books, magazines, newspapers, advertisements, and broadsides available to a much greater extent than ever before. Significantly, such works were filled with images by the thousands.

The litany of significant technological developments seems nearly endless. The 1820s saw a decline in the cost of paper because the completion of the Erie and

Champlain canals combined with more efficient paper mill technology in New England allowed for cheaper shipping and production of paper, so that the size of print runs increased and regional prices fell steadily.³³ In 1836, Isaac Adams invented the steam-driven flatbed press, which was widely adopted and transformed printing so that almost anyone could run a press that had required immense strength fifty years before. Stereotyping in 1811 and electrotyping in 1841 allowed for the creation of permanent, fairly inexpensive metal plates that could be stored and reused, rather than reset, allowing for inexpensive reprintings of books. Industrialization changed bookbinding with the advent of a hand-operated stabbing machine (1820), rolling press (1840), folding machine (1843), rounder and backer (1854), and various gilding, marbling, cutting, and trimming machines.³⁴ The list could go on. All of this led to a much greater production and distribution of printed matter, and advancements in the production of graphic images meant that whenever desirable, books and magazines could include at least some quality of image without going to outlandish expense. Printers introduced lithography in the United States in 1818, and by midcentury approximately 200 lithographic firms operated in over 24 American cities.³⁵

Pictures became more prevalent in all fields: books for religious and public education, illustrated children's books, broadsides and advertising, illustrated magazines and newspapers, and artistic prints. While it is true that large-scale, detailed prints of the finest quality would still have been rare objects among most American households, we must not scoff at even the simplest woodcuts, as they provided a visual vocabulary that would impact Americans' evaluation of all future images. These woodcuts and engravings, chosen or created to illustrate the outpouring of stories and texts, were largely simple genre scenes picturing events from everyday

life, as we will see in the fourth chapter discussion of the American Sunday School Union.

Indeed, sometimes engravers superseded the painters who composed the scenes they committed to plates for printing runs. Lilly Martin Spencer complained about the injustice she suffered at the hands of engravers and the companies who employed them. Until she started copyrighting her paintings in the 1860s, she was paid a flat fee to reproduce her images, not royalties, and she was often paid less than the engraver. For some, she received nothing at all. *Life's Happy Hour*, a painting she allowed to be reproduced by the Western Art Union, brought her no income, but the engraver Alfred Jones received \$1,200. In her letters, she blamed the lack of sales of her original paintings on the reproduction of so many lithographs and engravings, meaning that even the rich came to see her works as commonplace.³⁶ Some illustrators achieved fame in their own right as both copyists and limners of the pictures they created. F. O. C. Darley illustrated the 1848 publication of Washington Irving's popular *The Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon*, and his compositions utilize similar vocabulary found in contemporary genre paintings. In "The Singing Lesson," (Figure 12) an image designed to accompany Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," the same preoccupation with vocal interaction and sound is visible. Here the artist has chosen a relatively obscure scene from the story, focusing on Ichabod's instruction of Katrina Van Tassel in the singing arts, and both Crane's conducting hand gesture and the gaping mouths of the characters serve to draw attention to the sonic resonance of the moment. This represents just one of many images present in the book. Additionally, new genres arose to take advantage of the ready availability of print technology, and artists like Mount began submitting their works for engraving in

gift books, small annual volumes that contained about eight prints per book. These “embellishments,” as they were called, represented another venue wherein someone might encounter the work of even the most famous genre painters of the day (see Chapter Three for more discussion of this medium).³⁷

Americans therefore collected genre images in their own homes by way of the booksellers and magazine distributors of the day. On top of this, they might encounter paintings much more frequently as venues for artistic exhibition multiplied and the art world grew more professionalized. New York City was the hub of many of these developments, and residents or visitors to the city could attend the annual exhibit of the National Academy of Design (NAD), likely the American art world’s biggest art event held each May and June beginning with the NAD’s founding in 1825. As previously noted, the city also housed the Düsseldorf Gallery from 1848, and artists could belong to the Apollo Association, the New-York Gallery of the Fine Arts, and the Sketch Club. The American Art-Union (AAU) emerged out of the Apollo Association in early 1844, and it too held an annual exhibition each year to showcase the paintings purchased, some of which would be engraved for mass distribution and the rest of which were handed out via a speculative and spectacular lottery at the annual event.³⁸ New York was not the only place to find such amenities, however. As a young woman exhibiting in Cincinnati, for example, Spencer sent her work to a variety of venues. Her first exhibition was in St. Luke’s rectory, a local church charging 25 or 37 cents per visit in the daytime and evening, respectively. She also showed at the second exhibition of the Section of Fine Arts of the Society for the Promotion of Useful Knowledge in June 1842; the Young Men’s Mercantile Library,

followed by an art raffle; at a local store known only as “Withington’s store”; and at the more official opening exhibition of the Western Art-Union in 1847.³⁹

Improvements in transportation further allowed more people to go to art, and more art to travel to people. Tanya Pohrt analyzed very specifically one pattern of traveling art exhibitions—the single picture exhibition—during the early national period, as steam travel among other things allowed John Trumbull, Thomas Sully, Rembrandt Peale, and others to move their paintings by sea and over land, balancing cost and time-efficient routes.⁴⁰ Works created for exhibition and eventual distribution via lottery present another pattern for the movement, display, and sale of paintings, giving us some idea of the breadth of audience images reached. For instance, George Caleb Bingham painted his *Country Politician* in St. Louis, where it was seen in his studio by a reporter in April of 1849 before it was formally exhibited in Cincinnati that year, listed for sale in the gallery of the Western Art Union, then taken to New York, bought by the AAU for \$200 and distributed in December to John Boyd of Winsted, Connecticut, as part of the 1849 lottery.⁴¹

Although nineteenth-century audiences had nowhere near the level of access to images with which we are familiar today, they nevertheless lived within a flourishing world of pictures. As imagery multiplied, it became more and more imperative for audiences to learn ways to negotiate the meanings of the pictures that surrounded them. Studying images became a key part of a child’s education (the subject of Chapter Four), and art criticism helped viewers determine how to value images.

American Stories and Talk

If theoreticians and psychologists are to be believed, a good story is far more than simply an idle pastime for entertainment or communication. Sarah E. Worth

argued that people use narrativity to order their experience and make coherent sense out of seemingly unrelated events, and thus understanding narrativity is essential to understanding human ways of knowing. She asserted that epistemological benefits of reading, hearing, and telling stories include the development of “narrative reasoning” and “narrative meaning construction,” skills that help people develop enhanced reasoning abilities.⁴² These contemporary arguments are echoed in the practical advice given by Catherine Beecher, who asserted in 1841 that “the use of those works of imagination, which embrace fictitious narrative...is not only lawful, but necessary and useful,” as “is settled by Divine examples in the parables and allegories of Scripture.” While some stories might be dangerous if they include “vice and crime,” in other cases they are almost medically necessary for proper mental development. “Some minds are torpid and phlegmatic, and need to have the imagination stimulated.... Some persons are often so engaged in absorbing interests, that any thing [sic] innocent, which for a short time will draw off the mind, is of the nature of a medicine.”⁴³

Storytelling and direct observation of events and objects were seen as particularly beneficial to the memory. O. S. Fowler argued in 1842 that men who could commit whole stories to memory possessed a skill essential to happiness in all walks of life. He stated that memory could only be strengthened by “calling it into *vigorous and habitual* exercise; and, this must be done...by keeping before the mind *interesting events to be remembered.*” Fowler pointed to examples where constant storytelling led to great memories and excellent historians and scholars, as in Native American cultures, where people knew more about their own histories because they heard them in the form of stories, than did contemporary Americans.⁴⁴ Memory was not to be passed up by artists either. In his 1859 journal, Mount scribbled a reminder

to “Cultivate the memory. Look attentively at an object, or a scene, and go to your room and see if you can paint it from memory. *Try*, try, we do not know ourselves, until we try.”⁴⁵

Walter Benjamin has famously addressed the notion of the storyteller as an always-past, nostalgic remembering of something that has been absent since the development of the newspaper and the novel. For him, the modernization that came with print culture produced a cultural enshrinement of the storyteller because the rise of the novel and forces of modernization led to a devaluation of lived experience. “The storyteller in his living immediacy is by no means a present force. He has already become something remote from us and something that is getting even more distant.”⁴⁶ In some ways, this nostalgic remembering of the mythic figure of the storyteller can help account for the increasing popular depictions of storytellers as iconic American figures during the mid-nineteenth century, when all manner of printed things were spreading across the nation in amazing volume.

Jacksonian-era obsession with voice, orality, story, and storyteller tied these notions inextricably to the American character. To be American was to be both a storyteller and a listener of stories. Popular American fiction developed the trope of the fictionalized oral historian or storyteller, which served as a framing narrative for the presentation of anthologies of tales. Washington Irving’s *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*, published for the first time serially throughout 1819 and 1820 (and republished again and again as the century progressed), serves as a prime example of this. Not only is the text supposedly written by a fictional character, Geoffrey Crayon, it includes stories “found” in the papers of yet another fictional character, the Dutch oral historian Diedrich Knickerbocker, who jotted down the

stories of “Rip Van Winkle” and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” during his supposed travels. Irving had already introduced Knickerbocker to American audiences a decade before in 1809, as the theoretical author of his first book, *A History of New-York*. Irving used this fictional oral historian as a marketing device, drawing on the public’s interest in vanishing oral histories, and in the author’s most famous story from the volume, “Rip Van Winkle,” the titular character is yet another storyteller.⁴⁷

In her analysis of American types in genre paintings, Johns has pointed out several of these iconic figures, and significantly, the two most closely tied to stereotypes of American character were viewed in the popular imagination as storytellers. The Northeastern Yankee or yeoman farmer spoke in a “downeast” drawl, elaborating stories for listeners and readers in fictionalized depictions in popular magazines like *The Spirit of the Times*, in plays produced for the American stage, and most especially in the Jack Downing stories published by American author Seba Smith. Sarah Burns identified this type as the Yankee or Jonathan, who was often regarded with nationalistic pride as quintessentially American. He was portrayed in theater, literature, and paintings, and one of his key characteristics was his facility with words and his identity as a teller of long tales.⁴⁸ The backwoodsman or mountain man figure too came to be closely connected with notions of storytelling, as can be seen in Ranney’s *Advice on the Prairie*. Long before Mark Twain’s publication of western stories in his 1872 book *Roughing It*, the American West came to represent the ideal ground for stories told about western adventures and sights, and the iconic figure of the mountain man or western storyteller permeated popular literature.

In 1835, the Bostonian art critic and scholar John Neal published an encomium to storytelling in the *New-England Magazine*. Neal argued for the importance of storytelling not just for Americans, but for all humanity, and he sought to excavate the reputations of storytellers by comparing them to great historical thinkers and writers like Aesop, Plutarch, and Seneca, finally pointing to the Bible itself as filled with rich examples of storytelling. Neal wrote, “*story-telling* would appear to be the great business of life with a majority of mankind, the chief purpose of language almost everywhere, and the sole employment of multitudes who are perpetually breaking away from the dead level of their age.” He filled his text with rhapsodic prose praising storytelling, highlighting ancient examples like hieroglyphs and mythology, and describing it as the medium for all “upward-striving” individuals from warriors and legislators to philosophers and statesmen. He reproved people who “speak of storytellers with irreverence—of story-telling, without a generous leap of the heart, as if it were possible for the affairs of the world to go on, for society to hold together a single hour without the help of both!” Neal went on to give several examples of the high art of storytelling, which he believed had reached a pinnacle among the storytellers of the American west, focusing on western subject matter. He argued that “none are so delightful to me as those I over-hear on board a steamboat or a stage-coach,” which he termed “stories from real life” or “*live* stories.” He exemplified these through a retelling of stories about steamboat accidents. Neal addressed how audiences should react to stories, advocating emotional sympathy and mental visualization. He advised his readers to “just put yourself in the situation of these two unprotected females at this moment” and later asked readers to “behold them on their way back to the City.” Sympathizing with the characters in a story was important, and

the reaction of one's audience was everything in the evaluation of a good storyteller. Neal describes a time he attempted to tell a steamboat story, "but nobody stared—nobody drew a long breath, after I had got through—no questions were asked," leading him to believe he had failed as a storyteller.⁴⁹

Neal was not alone in his interest in the place of storytellers in society, and his desire to point out the characteristics of both good and bad storytellers. Periodical writers addressed the subject time and again. Sometimes, as in an 1834 article in the *Christian Watchman*, authors pointed to the moral failings of "story telling," treating it as the kind of boasting or exaggeration that could lead to moral decay as its "idle words" replaced the truth that the true Christian should seek instead.⁵⁰ More often, however, authors praised storytellers as possessing a particularly necessary skill, and described both the positive effects of a good story on its listeners and problematic encounters with bad storytellers. One author wrote in 1828 in the *Philadelphia Album and Ladies Literary Gazette*

A man must have something to say, as well as know how to say it. I wish many story-tellers would think of this. They set out with a great flourish, make a mighty stir and preparation, and rouse your attention by effecting a deal of mystery. You are absorbed in expectation. You look sharp at every appearance of an incident, as something which bears on a great catastrophe at hand. You see meaning in every item of the narration. You spy a wonder in the minutest particular. You lend your imagination to wind up the plot, but when you come to the end, you make the discovery that your ingenious and gifted author has been telling you nothing at all.⁵¹

This passage points out how storytelling was a collaborative experience that required active participation by both the storyteller and the listener, who did a great deal of mental work as he listened to the story and visualized what he heard. Significantly, the author uses terms related to vision—"look sharp," "see meaning," and "spy a

wonder”—in his description of this process. Pictures could showcase stories being told, asking viewers to imagine the sounds of what they were seeing, and it is clear that nineteenth-century thinkers were equally aware of how the process worked in reverse, as oral words evoked visual imaginings. The mechanics of storytelling were important to nineteenth-century listeners. In her article “How to Tell a Story,” published in *Graham’s Magazine of Literature and Art* in 1843, Mrs. Seba Smith not only advocates storytelling for children in particular as a way for a boy to be “building up the materials for a man—a man firm, enterprising and self-sustained—the only wealth, the only true dignity.” She also discusses the details of the storytelling process. Smith advocates storytelling at night, and particularly in settings like a “rich antique room, or old-fashioned farm-house...in our rough cottage with smoky rafters; or, better still, in some rude cabin upon the wild frontier...[or] by the sea shore, or by a dim wood fire with a fierce tempest raging without;” failing all these picturesque locations, one should at least make the light dim and coming from behind some large object that allows it to cast shadows. The storyteller “should never hurry, least of all be interrupted—as for himself he should think for the time being only of his story; give himself up and become a part of what he relates.” Self-abandonment was a vital aspect both for tellers and listeners. Smith follows this advice with two negative examples of storytelling, one lacking all details whatsoever and another where the preoccupied teller continually interrupts herself and stymies the listener’s desires.⁵²

Story-telling and story-listening were particularly important because Americans lived in a world where, far from replacing orality, print culture *was* vocal culture.⁵³ As David Vincent has argued, “at every level, the sound of the human voice was magnified rather than quelled by the mass production and distribution of prose

and verse. The simple relationship between the faceless publisher and the soundless reader was disrupted by men and women reciting, singing, shouting, chanting, declaiming, and narrating.”⁵⁴

Nowhere is this link between Americans and the American voice more visible than in the rising interest in Americanisms as vernacular speech, the American language, and tall talk, subjects further discussed in Chapter Three. Scholars and writers sought out and codified the sound of America in its speech, recording linguistic twists of the tongue phonetically in text and dictionary. Noah Webster began to urge that America should have its own language, separate from Britain, as he traveled the country in the late eighteenth century listening to American speech and including new words like bullfrog and skunk and using quotations from American authors (George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Washington Irving, etc.) in his dictionary. By 1848, when John Russell Bartlett published his carefully compiled *Dictionary of Americanisms: A Glossary of Words and Phrases, Usually Regarded as Peculiar to the United States*, American dialect had permeated much popular fiction, both in the words used and in the idiosyncratic spelling chosen to convey the oddities of the American accent to readers.⁵⁵

Americans were famous talkers, and talk was so important a part of one’s social identity that in 1851, Frederic Saunders published a long discourse on the merits of various types of talkers. He distinguished between “the babbler” who meddles too much in the affairs of others, spreading gossip and rumors; “the small talker,” who constantly prattles and overtalks about commonplaces of daily life; “the objective talker,” who instantly challenges the accuracy of any man’s opinion, no matter how well-founded; “exclaimers” who talk in admirations, as “every topic, however

commonplace, provokes their superlative wonder”; “interrogators” who question everything indefatigably in a search for truth; “exclusive talkers” who claim to already know everything and monopolize the conversation; and “exaggerators” who speak in high-flung metaphors and hyperbole, amusing their company as “an extravaganza in the social circle.” While some of these types of people might annoy one with their bad habits, there is only one type who receives outright condemnation: “the taciturn.” He has nothing but disdain for these incommunicative individuals who are “social nuisances,” for “conversation is one of the polite arts of life,-- its end and aim being the cultivation of the graces and attractions of the social economy.”⁵⁶

For American audiences, storytellers were more than just backwoodsmen or down-home Yankees who told stories at far-flung locations or in print. Storytelling was seen as a vital part of polite social discourse, and a middle- or upper-class social event was vastly enriched by the presence of a good storyteller who “makes himself extremely conspicuous either by the brightness of his wit...or the excellence of his stories.” In this setting, the storyteller smooths social tensions, banishes tedium, and artfully engages the interest of his audiences.⁵⁷

People expected American speakers to go beyond the conversational arts of the drawing room, however. The nineteenth-century orator held a special place in society that is easy to overlook in a world like ours where the art of the voice has been largely replaced by popular media, video, and film. The stump speaker, for example, was a type that came to stand in as the iconic figure of Jacksonian democracy. As Mark Smith has argued, the spoken political word and “the din and tumult” that could accompany it, even though it could “assail the eyes and ears” of politicians, was seen as healthy, since “the spoken political word was heard democracy.”⁵⁸ Voters expected

politicians to take their campaigns to the people, debating or speaking four to five hours every day for up to two months as they “took the stump” in front of largely uneducated, backwoods crowds in the rural west and south. Eloquence was its own goal and qualification for office, and citizens expected a politician who desired election to put on a long-winded but fiery performance of oratorical bombast, of which storytelling played a large part. In *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville wrote of the American political debate that “the electors... take it for granted that their chosen deputy is an orator, that if he can he will speak often.” He continued, “Even the women often go to public meetings and forget household cares while they listen to political speeches.... An American does not know how to converse, but he argues; he does not talk, but expatiates. He always speaks to you as if addressing a meeting, and if he happens to get excited, he will say ‘Gentlemen’ when addressing an audience of one.”⁵⁹ Potential candidates could lie and exaggerate, tell tall stories of their past exploits, drink and shout, shoot rifles to prove their manliness...anything except remain silent. The notorious David Crockett of Tennessee recorded starting one of his speeches, “I’m...David Crockett, fresh from the backwoods, half-horse, half-alligator, a little touched with the snapping-turtle; can wade the Mississippi, leap the Ohio, ride upon a streak of lightning, and slip without a scratch down a honey locust.”⁶⁰

This is the world that George Caleb Bingham depicts in his painting *Stump Speaking* of 1853-1854 (Figure 13), completed as part of a political series that Goupil, Vibert & Co. later engraved and mass produced. A white-clad speaker stands upon a platform, gritting his teeth and gesturing vehemently as he counts his points off on his fingers and leans forward eagerly towards his audience, attempting to bend them to his own point of view. This is the passionate political speaker at work, rendering his

arguments for the eager ears of his listeners, who are vast and varied in appearance and attitude. Bingham described his process of composition in political terms: “a new head is continually popping up and demanding a place in the crowd, and as I am a thorough democrat, it gives me pleasure to accommodate them all. The consequence, of this impertinence on one side and indulgence on the other, is, that instead of the select company which my plan first embraced, I have an audience that would be no discredit to the most populous precinct of Buncomb.”⁶¹ Scholars have repeatedly addressed this painting in terms of the politics involved, a logical choice considering Bingham’s own involvement in the political scene. He ran for state legislature twice as a member of the Whig party, winning the seat in 1848, and he remained an active Missouri Whig into the 1850s, only leaving the party when issues of slavery became too divisive. Scott Casper has cogently discussed the work as Bingham’s meditation on the political system and marketplace of the day, identifying three figures as representative of three eras of American politics: 1) the top-hatted, luminous gentleman at the right as a statesmanlike reference to the Jeffersonian past of gentleman farmers; 2) the wild-eyed speaker as a Jacksonian demagogue pushing the party line without much regard to public service or fact; and 3) the self-absorbed boy counting his change in the foreground as representing a materialistic future of isolated citizens ignoring public life. Perhaps Bingham himself is even present in the painting, in the person of the gentleman seated just behind the speaker, taking notes and frowning as he prepares to address the audience next, unsure of how he will top the passionate rant presently being delivered.⁶²

While this interpretation of the painting in regards to Bingham’s specific politics is insightful, more attention needs to be paid to the more general topic of the

work as well. The painting represents the American political scene as a place for oratorical gestures, speech, listening, and response. To be a citizen was to engage in the public debate, whether as a public speaker or as an auditor, and Bingham has stuffed his painting with representations of dozens of listeners in attitudes ranging from repose to attentiveness. Some men comment on what is being said to their neighbors, some eagerly lean forward or twist about to gaze upon the speaker, and two beneath the platform doze off or, if we're being friendly, close their eyes to better contemplate the rhetoric. And yet, the real character and subject of the painting is rhetoric itself. The spoken word links all of these men together, joining the citizens of all ages and economic backgrounds as common listeners. The painting's composition is not centered on the speaker or on any one hearer, but rather in the space where their gazes meet, the space of speech and discourse that unites the heterogeneous body politic. It is also important to note that Bingham does not treat discourse as an inert participant in the political process. Words do work, and one must be wary of the persuasiveness that could ensnare an inattentive auditor. Bingham also noted, "In my orator, I have endeavored to personify a wily politician, grown gray in the pursuit of office and the service of his party. His influence upon the crowd is manifest" and behind him sits "a shrewd clear-headed opponent, who is busy taking notes and who will, when his turn comes, make sophisms fly like cobwebs before the housekeeper's broom."⁶³ Thus the tricky politician is attempting to use his incendiary speech to persuade his audience of something that seems correct but is actually deceptive. One can escape the trap only by closely paying attention to what is said, taking notes, and being ready to meet sophistry with reasoned preparation. Bingham is offering proscriptions and prescriptions for how to encounter the oratory of the political scene.

Those in danger are the men who doze off or silently accept what is being said without discussing or evaluating it, and those who grin at the speaker's bombast without taking note of the fiendish expression on his face, made more readily apparent in the preparatory sketch Bingham completed for the figure (Figure 14).

Talk could provide entertainment or political engagement, and to the nineteenth-century citizenry, oratory might also represent that path towards enlightenment or saving one's soul, which became integrally tied to storytelling and story listening. Religious leaders were also speakers, yet unlike in the past when a Puritan minister might speak to one small congregation, the mid-nineteenth century saw the rise of the mass market preacher. Henry Ward Beecher's heyday from the 1840s coincided with the rise of very public political speech. He reached a wide audience, not only his own congregation but over 3000 spectators who attended his Sunday sermons, as well as those who read his speeches when they were reprinted in newspapers. Beecher was at the forefront of a "national trend in preaching that rejected dry, doctrinal analysis in favor of graphic illustrations, parables, and narrative storytelling, which would engage the imagination rather than reason." In his *Yale Lectures on Preaching*, he explained that storytelling was the only way to reach a broad population, arguing for the use of slang, jokes, mimicry, autobiographical anecdotes, and confessions.⁶⁴ Evangelical preachers also attempted to appeal to the spirit through the ears, not the intellect, of their audiences, who were called "hearers." The common thought indicated that one had to make noise to gain the attention of passive hearers, turning them into active listeners. Shouting aloud was a sign of spiritual passion in evangelicalism, as opposed to the devil who whispered.⁶⁵

So too did oratory permeate education, both for children and adults.⁶⁶ Schoolchildren were taught to recite and speak publicly, and in his 1838 reminiscences, Warren Burton describes the introduction of oratory into his schooling by “Mr. Spoutsound”:

What a rumaging [sic] of books, pamphlets and newspapers now took place, to find pieces to speak.... Those pieces were deemed best by us grandsons of the Revolutionists which most abounded in those glorious words, Freedom, Liberty, Independence, and other spirit-kindling names and phrases, that might be mentioned. Another recommendation was high-flown language, and especially words that were long and sonorous, such as would roll thunderingly from the tongue. For like our district professor we had the impression that noise was the most important quality in eloquence. The first, the second and the third requisite was the same; it was noise, noise, noise. Action, however, or gesticulation, was not omitted. This was considered the next qualification of the good orator. So there was the most vehement swinging of arms, shaking of fists, and waving of palms. That occasional motion of the limb and force of voice, called emphasis, was not a characteristic of our eloquence, or rather it was all emphasis. Our utterance was something like the continuous roar of a swollen brook over a mill-dam, and our action like the unintermitted whirling and clapping of adjacent machinery.⁶⁷

Once they left school, children would not escape oratory, for the home was also riddled with recitation and orality, in the form of reading aloud stories from newspapers, novels, and magazines. In an 1848 letter, Lilly Martin Spencer described her evenings at home: ““Myself at my pictures or sewing, and Ben reading loud.”⁶⁸ Harriet Beecher Stowe advocated reading aloud to keep servants in line. In his memoirs, Stephen Allen of New York discusses how he read Tom Paine’s columns aloud to his uncle, who would comment on the passages. Even *The American Farmer* advised parents to have their children read aloud from the magazine in succession: “...contemplate the picture of innocence and happiness, represented by the honest husbandman, sitting with his helpmate after the toils of the day round the cheerful fire,

in the midst of a groupe [sic] of happy, healthful children, each of whom reads alternatively that which improves them....”⁶⁹

If they internalized any of that eloquence and grandiloquent speech, young scholars might have a chance at growing up to participate as local or traveling public speakers at lyceums across the country. The lyceum movement began in America in 1826 when Yale graduate Josiah Holbrook published a manifesto attempting to prompt American citizens to foment an adult education movement by building lyceums in their towns, stating that public education was “intimately connected with the diffusion of intelligence, and with the elevation of character among the agricultural and mechanic classes.” Within two years, lyceums had sprung up in every state in the union, and one of their primary activities was the lecture series. At first, lecturers tended to be mostly local celebrities well versed in literature or law, politics or the ministry, but by the 1850s, eastern lecturers like Ralph Waldo Emerson traveled the lecture circuit among Midwestern lecture halls, establishing their fame. Thus in the nineteenth century, many authors were actually lecturers, and audiences first encountered works by Emerson and Thoreau aurally.⁷⁰

Speeches and Images

Americans were treated to oratory and storytelling at school and in the home, at church and in the political arena, at local events to hear out-of-town lecturers and at public gatherings for holidays and celebrations where they might hear local celebrities. It should therefore be unsurprising that in a culture so permeated by oratorical performances, artworks accompanied by lectures and talks were also popular.

Although George Catlin began his professional life studying the law, he soon gave it up and is best known today for the hundreds of paintings he completed of

Native Americans, inspired by multiple trips west along the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers, as he attempted to document a “vanishing race.” He focused heavily on portraits, landscapes, and genre scenes depicting life among the Sioux, the Chippewa, the Mandan, and dozens of other tribes. His journals and letters provide dramatic accounts of his journeys between 1832 and 1836, along with a vast amount of ethnographic information recorded during his time spent with Native American guides and in villages. However, to his contemporaries Catlin was most well known as a performer, lecturer, and exhibitor. Traveling lecturers were common at the time, but Catlin offered something exceptional for his audiences. By the time he returned east in 1837 to debut his art for public view, his collection of works had grown to include 474 paintings, 300 of which were individual portraits and the rest, as advertised, were “beautiful Landscapes of the Prairies of the ‘Far West’—Views of Indian Villages—Dances, Sports and Amusements.”⁷¹ He opened his collection to the public for the first time in Pittsburgh, where he charged 50 cents admission, probably aiming at attracting the city’s elite manufacturing class. He advertised not only the exhibition of hundreds of Indian portraits, but also promised entertainment through an oratorical performance on the part of the artist: “Mr. Catlin will endeavor to entertain them...with the exhibition of 100 Indian Portraits, explaining at the same time, their peculiar manners, customs &c.” A critic of the exhibition remarked on the authenticity of the art on display, verified by Catlin’s self, for his “modest and unassuming deportment, the simple and unostentatious manner of his explanations and narrations, were perfectly satisfactory guarantees of the truth of every assertion which he made.”⁷² From the very beginning, therefore, the artist saw and billed Catlin’s

Indian Gallery as a spectacle, and the authenticating voice of the artist permeated the viewer's experience of the images they saw.

Catlin traveled with his Indian Gallery, moving from Pittsburgh to Cincinnati to New Orleans, but he achieved his true fame and success when he finally set up shop in New York City. In September of 1837, the grand show was announced in the Amusements section of the *Commercial Advertiser*:

CATLIN'S INDIAN GALLERY. Opens for Exhibition on Monday Evening, the 25th instant and will be continued each evening.... In the lecture room of Clinton Hall. There will be several hundred Portraits exhibited, as well as splendid Costumes—Paintings of their villages—Dances—Buffalo hunts—Religious ceremonies, etc. Collected by himself, among the wildest tribes of America, during an absence from this city of seven years. Mr. Catlin will be present at all of his exhibitions, giving illustrations and explanations in the form of a Lecture...each admission 50 cents.⁷³

Catlin's showmanship was accompanied by a keen business sense, at least at first. He sent a man ahead to blanket the city with 40,000 handbills before he arrived, and the gallery was such a success that they had to turn many away and eventually moved from Clinton Hall to the larger Stuyvesant Institute in October. Unfortunately, the specific contents of Catlin's talks are lost to us, but they were described as "spontaneous oral explanations."⁷⁴

The spectacle was key to the success of the Indian Gallery, both to draw visitors in the first place and in the memories of those who attended. One of the most publicized moments in the life of the Indian Gallery was the night when the lecture hall was visited by "Keokuck, Black Hawk, and other chiefs and braves of the Sac and Fox tribes." Originally published in the *New York Evening Star*, retellings of the event found their way into newspapers as far away as Albany and Cleveland. People flocked to the sensational event; indeed the reviewer, "Major Noah," explains that "the

rush was so great of all the fashion, elegance, and taste of the city, (one third ladies) that the room was filled to overflowing and hundreds had to go away.—There were about one thousand persons present.”⁷⁵ Catlin launched into his lectures, adding extemporaneously to his show to make use of the additional live exhibits that his visitors provided him. He showed portraits of individuals, including Keokuck and Black Hawk, who were encouraged to stand next to the paintings. He had one man show how to draw a bow, after which he continued to show and describe portraits, costumes, and customs of the Sac and Fox tribes, their enemies, and other tribes as well. Reviewers made much of the fact that Indians stood in front of portraits of themselves and men they knew, approving Catlin’s tales, and adding stories of their own. The reviewer wrote, “Mr. Catlin was now in his glory. He had before him about 50 of those warriors, whose history and customs and costumes he had been so eloquently describing, placed by his side to verify or falsify the narrations he gives, and which some have thought too high-colored.”⁷⁶ In this setting, artworks were treated as objects that launched stories and verified social interaction and acquaintance. Paintings invoked dialogues so memorable that Major Noah recorded them in his review of the event.

Keokuck, who is about 50 years of age, we should judge, now asked through his interpreter why Mr. C. did not show the portrait which he had taken of him on horseback. Mr. C. answered that he had purposely reserved this most interesting of his productions to the last, which occasioned a general shout of approbation among all of them. At last this was presented, and it created the liveliest sensation possible, as may well be imagined. Mr. C. said some of his friends had thought he had made the horse too beautiful; but he added that Keokuck had brought him down 60 miles purposely, to Col. Kearney’s camp, and paraded all day on him, for Mr. C. to get a correct picture, & then appealed to him. Keokuck having this explained by the interpreter, (Mr. Leclaire) rose with all the majesty belonging to his royal rank, and

told the audience with forcible gesticulation, as he stretched out his muscular arm and small hand, in his own musical language, that the horse was exact—that he bought him of the interpreter, whom he pointed to, and added with much emphasis, distinctly audible to all, that as he was an admirer of fine horses, he never would have purchased any but one of the most noble breed. When the interpreter translated this short speech, the audience applauded enthusiastically.⁷⁷

It is evident that, even though this was a singular event that was more extravagant than most of the nights Catlin put on his show, the viewing of his artworks was far from a silent experience. The lecture hall was filled with the sound of Catlin's speech, applause, shouts, and the "liveliest sensation" possible, which one must imagine is far from quiet. Indeed, Major Noah dwells at length on the many tones and clamor that would have permeated the hall, finishing his review by discussing the sound of the language of the Sioux, which "seems to us like the most sonorous tones of the richest Castilian, and that of the Keokuck party sounded as we could have imagined the ancient Greeks spoke—less musical than the other, rougher and bolder, yet still more melodious." On another occasion, a different Indian delegation visited the Gallery, this one composed of Pawnees, Otawas, and Pawnee Loups, and by this time Catlin had embellished the room by adding a Crow Foot Lodge to the center, surrounded on all sides by paintings. Another sound joined the panoply available to visitors when the Indians "entered the lodge, sat themselves down, smoked the pipe, and beguiled the hour with one of their peculiar songs. 'Hark, 'tis the Indian drum,' was forcibly recalled to our minds, at the sound of their tum-tum. Mr. Catlin like an old friend was in the midst of them."⁷⁸ This precursor to the later Wild West shows combined art and dialogue with music, an atmosphere that the reviewer attempts to recreate for his newspaper audiences.

Catlin's gallery remained open in New York until February 28, when the artist donated his final night's proceeds of \$209.75 "for the benefit of the suffering poor."⁷⁹ Afterward, the artist moved onward to Washington, where by April he had reopened his gallery for the citizenry of the capital city, while he did his best to convince the U.S. government to purchase his collection. A broadside from April 1838 advertising the exhibition provides a bit more insight into how Catlin's audiences would have encountered the massive number of works on display (330 portraits, 100 landscape views, 12 buffalo hunting scenes, and 4 paintings of the Mandan religious ceremony). The advertisement explains that, "In order to render the Exhibition more instructive than it could otherwise be, the Paintings will be exhibited one at a time, and such explanations of their Dress, Customs, Traditions, &c. given by Mr. Catlin, as will enable the public to form a just idea of the Customs, Numbers, and Conditions of the Savages yet in a state of nature in North America."⁸⁰

Catlin's performances were hardly alone in their combination of painted art with lecture and spectacle. Panoramas were also accompanied by public lectures and verbal storytelling. "The Largest Painting in the World," bellowed the advertisements that regularly accompanied John Banvard's panorama of the Mississippi River, advertising the painting's presence in superlative language and eye-catching typography. For 50 cents admission (half that for the lucky children), audiences could enter and be entertained for hours by the artist's moving panorama, billed as "painted on THREE MILES of canvas, exhibiting a view of country 1200 miles in length, extending from the mouth of the Missouri River to the City of New Orleans."⁸¹ Banvard's work was the most popular example of this kind of attraction, a large moving panorama that was displayed at the front of a room as it was wound between

two spindles, unfolding a seemingly endless painting at which visitors could marvel as it moved before their eyes. The artist had already traveled and speculated in panoramas for several years before he began work on his famous Mississippi extravaganza, which he painted in Louisville, Kentucky, over the course of six years. The painting opened in October of 1846 and at first seemed like it might fail, but the shrewd artist gave free tickets to riverboat men so they would lend their own voices to advertising the painting's verisimilitude. For the next two years, Banvard's panorama was wildly popular, traveling from Louisville across the country to New Orleans, Boston, New York, and Washington, DC, before heading across the pond to England in fall of 1848.⁸²

Viewers tended to rhapsodize most often at the size of Banvard's panorama, the immense amount of labor that went into its production, and the marvelous nature of the experience to be had that means "you can hardly believe that you are not standing on the bank of the river, as it flows by...such perspective! Such coloring! Such illusions!"⁸³ However, significantly they did not sit and marvel at the painting in silence. As is visible in an illustration accompanying a broadside advertisement for Banvard's panoramas (Figure 15), the artist placed himself at the front of the room full of spectators, where he would accompany the entire panorama's progression with a pointer and a lecture. Ralph Hyde has argued of Banvard's talk, "“Though descriptive and statistical it was laced with jokes and poetry, all delivered with an attractive Yankee twang; it was not just a monologue, but conversational in nature. From Banvard onwards no panorama show was complete without a lecturer—later called the cicerone—and a painting's success or failure would depend at least as much on this man's wit and luxuriant vocabulary as on the panorama's qualities as a work of art.”⁸⁴

Banvard traveled with his painting, accompanying it with his witty patter at every turn of the spindle, and thus viewers would see the work embedded within his web of stories.

Sometimes attendees remembered and republished those stories in newspapers. “Another of Banvard’s Stories,” printed in the *Pensacola Gazette* in May of 1848, describes at length a joke played upon passengers and citizens of a town as Banvard was traveling along the Ohio River. He was bringing his great panorama east aboard a crowded steamboat in “very large and long boxes, which contained the different cylinders of the painting” and “were piled up on deck, which could not but meet the eyes of the passengers, and being painted red, soon caused many remarks to be made, as to what the contents could be.” One passenger approached the ship’s mate, who solemnly informed him that the boxes contained the bodies of soldiers who fell at the recent Battle of Palo Alto, warning him not to share the news with others to inhibit their spirits. Naturally, it was impossible to contain this gossip, and the passengers whispered amongst themselves then carried news of the upcoming arrival to the City of Cumberland, where the panorama would begin its overland journey north. A local captain of a volunteer company arranged a ceremonial escort with “solemn notes of martial music” and “a volley of three rounds fired in honor of the occasion,” after which the boxes of the “illustrious dead” panorama were loaded onto the train cars on their way north. John Banvard was in on this joke, and only later was it revealed to the citizens of the town, causing “many a hearty laugh.”⁸⁵ Although we have no firm evidence that the writer heard this story from Banvard himself during his lectures, it seems likely that it would typify the type of anecdote that the artist might use to fill the

time, chock full of humor and far-fetched exaggeration, and casting his panorama as the hero of the story.

Charles Dickens wrote a very long review of the work, published in the December 16, 1848 edition of the *Examiner* in London, in which he praised the work and its author, whom he described in detail. He highlighted Banvard's facility with words and "his manner of telling what he has to tell," posing the artist as a storyteller.

Here it is in London, with its painter standing on a little platform by its side explaining it; and probably, by this time next year, it and he may be in Timbuctoo. Few can fail to have some interest in such an adventure and in such an adventurer, and they will both repay it amply. There is a mixture of shrewdness and simplicity in the latter, which is very prepossessing; a modesty, and honesty, and an odd original humour, in his manner of telling what he has to tell, that give it a peculiar relish. The picture itself, as an indisputably true and faithful representation of a wonderful region—wood and water, river and prairie, lonely log hut and clustered city rising in the forest—is replete with interest throughout. Its incidental revelations of the different states of society, yet in transition, prevailing at different points of these three thousand miles—slaves and free republicans, French and Southerners; immigrants from abroad, and restless Yankees and Down-Easters ever steaming somewhere; alligators, store-boats, show-boats, theatre-boats, Indians, buffaloes, deserted tents of extinct tribes, and bodies of dead Braves, with their pale faces turned up to the night sky, lying still and solitary in the wilderness, nearer and nearer to which the outposts of civilization are approaching with gigantic strides to tread their people down, and erase their very track from the earth's face—teem with suggestive matter.⁸⁶

Dickens cast Banvard as a humorous storyteller able to explain the work with gusto and originality, adding greatly to the appeal of the whole experience; dwelling on the character of the artist-lecturer was a common pastime for reviewers, as if he was as much on display as the painting. He went on to enumerate a list of the "revelations" the painting afforded, doubtless calling on some of those descriptions advanced by the artist for his source material.

For audience members who wished to take memories of the panorama home with them, or perhaps follow along as Banvard described the moving work, the ticket purchase price also included an accompanying souvenir exhibition program. The program, *Description of Banvard's Panorama of the Mississippi River, Painted on Three Miles of Canvas*, offered more than its title implied.⁸⁷ Although it was coverless and cheaply bound with string, this booklet encompassed 50 pages of additional content for the assiduous patron. It began with a 6-page reprinting of "Tribute to Native Talent," a promotional piece from the *Boston Evening Gazette* in which the Massachusetts Governor Briggs and several members of Congress proclaimed the work's excellence and offered Resolutions to commend its illusion, truthfulness to nature, and "American genius and enterprise." Next, visitors could peruse a 15-page essay entitled, "Adventures of the Artist," supposedly included because so many people were always inquiring after seeing the painting. In an extremely colloquial, narrative style, the text told the story of Banvard, beginning, "There was a young lad of fifteen, a fatherless, moneyless youth, to whom there came a very extraordinary idea, as he was floating for the first time down the noble Mississippi." The language is highly romantic, dramatic, and exaggerated, referring to Banvard as "our hero" in the narrative. It discussed his poem, "The White Fawn," claiming that Banvard recited it to audiences, further evidence of the kind of talk to which viewers of his painting could expect to be treated. After this exuberant narrative, the reader found a 5-page description of the Mississippi River, its course, its tributaries, the quality of its water, its sand bars and wildlife, the forests along the banks, its grandeur, and the features of the country through which it passes. The penultimate section finally got to that description promised in the booklet's title. "THE PANORAMA" proceeded

through 39 separately delineated scenes, from north to south, beginning with Rush Island and ending with New Orleans. The accompanying text described the images of the panorama in sequence, giving a bit of history and anecdotes about each one.

RUSH ISLAND And Bar, with the wreck of the steamer West Wind, snagged here in June, 1846,--at the same time the artist was painting this portion of the river. This was a very unfortunate boat, having been previously blown up, and killing a large number of persons.⁸⁸

Finally, the program concluded with a series of testimonials from steamboat workers recommending the painting and an essay on “Life on the Mississippi,” describing the flatboats used on the river and the hard life of the river men, providing local color and descriptive narration about these interesting types with whom eastern audiences would have little or no experience.

Although it would be a mistake to confuse the text of this souvenir program with the contents of Banvard’s lectures, it is nevertheless clear that the Mississippi panorama was deeply embedded within layers of narrative and discourse about the artist, the creation of the work, the river itself and life upon it, and the nature of what it meant to be an American. Banvard’s painting was not alone in this, as most of the moving panoramas that toured the country in the mid-nineteenth century were accompanied by similar hype in newspapers and the programs that they provided to viewers, many of which included basic diagrams of the work, as did *Description of a View of the Great Temple of Karnak and the Surrounding City of Thebes* from 1839 (Figure 16). Aside from offering entertainment and attempting to create a commercial success for the artist who had invested a great deal of time and effort in the project, one of the primary goals seemed to be to invest the viewer with a real sense of landscape as a place filled with narrative, history, and unique resonances.

Speech and Images

One thing that becomes clear is that our current seesaw when viewing art between reverence and debate is nothing new. When William Sidney Mount first visited an art collection at the age of seventeen as a young man from rural Long Island who was new to the vibrant city of New York, he visited the gallery of the American Academy. In an autobiographical sketch, he described that experience: “As I ascended the stairs, the sight of so many pictures in rich frames, the figures the size of life looking upon me from all parts of the room, created a strange bewilderment of feeling such as I have never since known. I was alone, none to disturb the senery [sic] of delight with which I gazed upon them—my mind was awakened to a new life and big resolves for the future were then made.”⁸⁹ Here Mount described exactly the kind of revelatory, reverential experience in the presence of grandiose artwork that Nemerov much later referenced in a half-sarcastic tone.⁹⁰ The strangeness of the art he experienced, so foreign to his more mundane life up to that point, aroused a flurry of emotions and inspired him to take up the brush himself, and that sense of being alone and private in his thoughts—except for the life-size figures, as if they provided him company in some way—was obviously important to that revelation.

Later, Mount described the completion of his painting, *The Power of Music*, which he showed to a patron before it was delivered to its eventual owner: “When Mr. Charles M. Leupp, her son-in-law, received the painting [*The Power of Music*], He stood a long time looking at it until I began to think I had made a failure and observed to him, ‘If you think this picture will not suit Mrs. Lee, I will paint her another with pleasure.’ ‘Why man,’ he said, ‘I only wish the picture belonged to me.’”⁹¹ Again we see evidence of quiet contemplation of an artwork, although here we begin to see things working the other way. It was so unusual to stare for so long at a work without

discussing it in some fashion that Mount imagined there must be something wrong with the painting. In contrast, Henry James remembered visiting the 1851 exhibition of Emanuel Leutze's *Washington Crossing the Delaware* at New York's Stuyvesant Institute, the same place where Catlin had maintained his Indian Gallery. Over the course of its exhibition, more than 50,000 people came to see that painting, and James described his visit in terms of "going to the theater," for an outing to see the painting was to his eight-year-old self a glorious occasion.⁹² He remembered that no other youthful experience "was half so momentous as that of the epoch-making masterpiece of Mr. Leutze, which showed us Washington crossing the Delaware, in a wondrous flare of projected gaslight and with the effect of a revelation." He "gaped responsive at every item, lost in the marvel of wintry light, of the sharpness of the ice-blocks, the sickness of the sick soldier."⁹³

Mount was notoriously interested in the reception of his artwork, and scholars have written often about his role as a democratic painter, creating art for the people, spurred on by his own comments in letters and diaries. At various times in his life, the artist jotted down remarks including: "Paint scenes that come home to everybody. That every one can understand"; "I must paint such pictures that speak at once to the spectator, scenes that are most popular—that will be understood on the instant"; and "Paint pictures that will take with the public, in other words, never paint for the few but for the many. Some artists remain in the corner by not observing the above."⁹⁴ William T. Oedel has argued that this owes not so much to the painter's populism, but rather to his capitalist pragmatism and reformist impulses.⁹⁵

Mount's interest in the interactions between viewer and canvas and the social experience of viewing a work of art is also apparent in his visual imagery. In 1838,

Mount completed *Artist Showing His Work*, which came to be known as *The Painter's Triumph* (Figure 17), an oil on panel commissioned by Edward L. Carey of Philadelphia for inclusion in his annual gift book offering. It depicts a fashionably dressed artist in a rather plain studio, adorned by nothing but a few paintings turned against the wall and a sketch of the *Apollo Belvedere* with a pointer emphasizing it, evidence that the artist is familiar with the classical tradition. Yet, the head of the sculpture turns away from the scene in the center, possibly expressing disapproval or at least distance from the kind of work on display there, where the artist flamboyantly gestures toward his own work, pointing out the subject with enthusiasm to his viewer, a farmer figure bearing the typical scarf, hat, and whip that identify him as a particular social type familiar in Mount's work. Oedel sees the work as an exposition on Mount's theories of art, as the artist interprets classical traditions, creating a work based on grandiose principles that is nevertheless intelligible to the average farmer, like Mount's friends and neighbors on Long Island, who through that work would be socially elevated and educated. Above all, however, Mount has created a scene in which the artist and his viewer both stare avidly at a painting, engaging with it visually and likely verbally, for the artist's gesture resembles those utilized by orators making an argument or emphasizing a detail. The farmer has just arisen from his chair, placed directly behind him, moving closer and hunching forward to get a closer look at the painting. Perhaps the two men even engage in some visual comparison, not with the classical sketch on the wall behind them, but with the only other work that the two can see...the panel placed on the floor, propped up against the leg of the easel. Interestingly, it is this wood panel that more closely approximates the size and medium of Mount's own works of the time. *The Painter's Triumph* itself is an oil on

mahogany panel, just 19 ½” x 23 ½” in size, much more like the image on the floor than the grander canvas that adorns the artist’s easel. Regardless, Mount has depicted an artwork as a social experience, one of display and explanation, where close looking and discussion are appropriate.

Mount’s farmer views the painting with a grin on his face, and despite his lower class, he is not made to look ridiculous or out of place, as the artist stands next to him with a pleasant expression and actively seeks his approval. One cannot say the same for the five men who have stumbled into the artist’s studio in Johannes Adam Simon Oertel’s painting, *The Country Connoisseurs* of 1855 (Figure 18). Rather than applauding the discussion and storytelling that might occur in front of genre paintings, Oertel mocks lower class audiences. This painting, while likely his most famous among art historians, is actually a huge departure for Oertel. The artist preferred working on religious subjects featuring evangelists, angels, and biblical subjects, and he was himself a priest of the Episcopal Church. He had recently emigrated from Germany, in 1848, and once in America he found little market for the kinds of paintings he had trained to produce in Munich.⁹⁶ *The Country Connoisseurs* serves not only as a critique of a particular audience for art, but also a self-conscious satire of the subject matter and storytelling style he chose, one so fundamentally different from his more typical artistic production.

Given similarities in composition and subject, it is possible that Oertel would have seen *The Painter’s Triumph* engraved in its gift book setting. In the later painting, the room is obviously one belonging to an elite artist, with the requisite sketch of the *Apollo Belvedere* on the wall, plaster casts and velvet drapes occupying in the left foreground, waiting to be needed for an elaborate portrait or inclusion in a

history painting. At the right, a clarinet lies discarded next to a lamp and large book. This artist, obviously a gentleman based on his fine furnishings and accoutrements, has left the room, which has since been invaded. In contrast to Mount's viewer, these bumpkins are slovenly, dressed up in ill-fitting fancy clothes that they wear poorly. The man at the far right slouches and shoves his hand rudely in the pocket of his wrinkled pants, while his dog turns his rear to the painting. These are caricatures of the lower middle class, and they reflect Oertel's differing views towards his patrons, as the painting satirizes these unlikely viewers who gape uncomprehendingly at the work on display before them. Unlike Mount, Oertel never achieved much fame, and he was a fairly newly arrived immigrant from Germany when he painted this picture. He continued unsuccessfully throughout his lifetime to try to paint religious history paintings of a grandiose nature, which he thought his viewers never understood. Oertel wrote disparagingly of the American art public in the 1870s, claiming, "Not merit or demerit, but chance fixes a man's reputation here. He must 'fit' the public taste."⁹⁷ *The Country Connoisseurs* presents a vision of just what Oertel thought of public taste; for him, this viewing situation was antipathy.

In reality, very few art viewers in the mid-nineteenth century had the kind of experience depicted by either Mount or Oertel. Only the wealthy could afford to commission a work from an artist, and invitations to visit artists in their studios were few and far between in these days before the famously open artists' studios of the 1880s.⁹⁸ More typically, an art viewer might expect to see a painting hanging among many others on a gallery wall at an annual exhibition, like that displayed in the print, "Gallery of the Art-Union," produced for the 1849 issue of the *Bulletin of the American Art-Union* (Figure 19). This black-and-white print affords us a view down a

long, well-lit gallery, where paintings hang side-by-side along the entire length and height of the wall, their frames crammed in one next to the other. The reviewer of the National Academy Exhibition for the *New York Mirror* remarked upon the kind of attention necessary in this setting, where so much is “worthy of praise, but overlooked in our first cursory glance.” He returned to the exhibit a second time, as “only a very lengthened and careful survey enables one to judge accurately of so many productions, and to enter properly into their individual merits. For a time the mind is too much divided by a multiplicity of impressions to compare and reason justly, and a glaring picture sometimes monopolizes the attention, while a thousand quiet displays of taste and genius escape the notice.”⁹⁹

In the Art-Union print, there are benches down the middle of the room where some people sit to consult their exhibition catalogues or to get away from the crush of people who fill the room elsewhere. People of all ages, from small children to elderly, bespectacled women, haunt the halls of the gallery. Although it is difficult to make out details of dress, there seems to be a range of social class as well, from the top-hatted gentlemen escorting well-heeled ladies to the more modestly-attired man sitting on a bench in the very middle of the image, with his broad-brimmed hat placing him at a less fashionable level. The print conveys quite well how overwhelming the visual, social, and auditory experience of such a gallery would have been. There is so much to see, and yet people do not silently trudge from painting to painting. Instead, the artist treats us to small groups of people clustered around art works, engaging each other in conversation about it. At the right, a father stands next to two children who point up at a painting, and he raises his hand to his face in a contemplative gesture. At the left, one gentleman extends his hand towards a painting in the lower left, and his

companion leans in closer to hear what he says while his eyes follow the line of his indicative gesture. Everywhere you look, couples bend toward each other in conversation, and they look not at the other people, but at the paintings on the wall. Although in reality there was likely something of the “see and be seen” atmosphere at such a bustling event, this print conveys very little of that. It is also difficult to imagine that the room would be particularly quiet, and there is very little individual contemplation to be seen. Here, art motivates dialogue.

Perhaps the most seen and talked-about art object from the mid-nineteenth century stands at the center of a vast array of responses. Hiram Powers sculpted *The Greek Slave* in 1844, creating a pristinely white marble sculpture with a pathetic tale attached to it, that of a Greek girl captured by Turks and put up for sale in the Middle Eastern slave market. Joy Kasson has argued that the artist counterbalanced the woman’s nudity, which should otherwise have bothered American audiences, by presenting an invented story of captivity and auction, inviting the viewer to imagine the pathos and eroticism of the rest of the narrative and calling to mind orientalism, stories of harems, and controversial discussions of American slavery, but only through implication. The narrative appeared in pamphlets during the sculpture’s 1847-1849 American tour, and it offered a set of contradictions that allowed viewers to explore forbidden subjects and conceptualizations of women’s role in society, offering “a protective web of explanation.”¹⁰⁰ For viewers, however, her pathetic story, aloofness, and Christian modesty outweighed the sensuality of the subject, which was nonetheless present.

Audiences obsessed about the Greek slave. It was proclaimed “the most beautiful statue in the world,” and its sculptor was established as the American

“Phidias or Michel Angelo.”¹⁰¹ Hundreds of thousands of people saw the work during its tour around the country, and the outpouring of responses to the sculpture was unprecedented. A print published in the *Cosmopolitan Art Journal* in December of 1857 (Figure 20), ten years after the sculpture originally toured the country after it had settled in at the Dusseldorf Gallery in New York, attested to the longevity and long-lasting impact of the sculpture’s resonance among viewers of both genders. Even a child gazes up at the sculpture in the print, where its nudity is treated as a nonissue. As other artworks toured about the country, like Banvard’s panorama or Catlin’s Indian Gallery, notifications were printed in the popular press, yet they were almost always paid-for advertisements or pieces commissioned by the newspaper itself or reprinted from a more popular newspaper that could afford to hire writers for such things. *The Greek Slave*, however, produced something else. Masses of responses were printed in newspapers, magazines, art journals, and gift books, almost all of them written by viewers who had attended the exhibition and found themselves so moved that they felt it necessary to put pen to paper to contribute to the greater discussion about the sculpture. One anonymous viewer sent a piece of unsigned correspondence to the *Daily National Intelligencer* in Washington, DC, which printed his response on August 25, 1847: “I have spent an hour in dwelling upon its great beauty of design, its perfect symmetry of form and proportion, and exquisite finish. I shall not attempt any artistical criticism upon it, for which I have no disposition, and perhaps no ability; but in my plain way give a very brief description of it.”¹⁰² Others were not so hesitant to dive into rhapsodies of verse. An anonymous contributor sent a short poem to *The Literary World*, addressed directly to the slave which it treats like a living thing claiming, “Thou art become a soul, sweet marble life,/ A pleader for the good, not

knowing evil strife.”¹⁰³ Poems were similarly offered to her by Henry T. Tuckerman, a scholar of art, and by women who had seen the work and were moved by it.¹⁰⁴ One woman, Grace Greenwood, visited the sculpture in its hall in New York and later felt compelled to write about the experience to her friend Lynn in Philadelphia on July 4, 1848. She described her experience before the work:

As I entered the exhibition room, and marked first the exquisite, the adorable beauty of the figure, I paused involuntarily, for she seemed unapproachable in the divinity of her perfect loveliness. Then my eye fell upon her manacles and chain; I saw the proud sadness of her attitude, and drew near with a pity which was half awe. Then first I looked full upon that face, grand in its heroic endurance, divinely beautiful in its purity, and inexpressibly touching in its sorrows. I trembled, my heart beat audibly, the tears sprang to my eyes, and for some moments I gazed through mists of sad but most exquisite emotion.... The reverential silence in the presence of the Greek Slave has been often remarked. No one speaks above a whisper, and many gaze with hushed breath and tearful eyes, in a dreamy trance of admiration, in the full, deep enjoyment of a new and delicious sensation.... If any there be who feel the moral sentiments of this statue, without understanding its source, let them glance at the locket and the cross, hanging from the column at her side. To a woman's nature originally great, a worthy love and a true religious faith impart a beauty and a grandeur which poetry and art have sanctified themselves in interpreting and embodying. By the embroidered cap and robe at her side, as well as by the exquisite delicacy of her hands, we may know that the maiden is noble, and that luxury and homage have waited upon her steps from infancy. Then how fearful this bondage, this exposure! Manacles on those soft, fair hands, and the gaze of vulgar eyes upon that unrobed, patrician form! Yet of all this she evidently thinks not wholly, but with the sublime unselfishness of a great soul, loses her own sorrow in that of those she loves. Her heart is far away with her brave and struggling country. Perchance she sees her sire vainly pouring out his life-blood for its lost liberties. She revisits in spirit her desolate home, where her mother grieves ceaselessly for the child she shall fold to her breast no more; whose return she looks not for, and whose name little children speak mournfully. And now are her thoughts with him, the best beloved; who, with his young life darkened by

despair, his heart riven by grief and maddened by wrong, yet battles for his lost Greece, or sighs his soul out in weary captivity.¹⁰⁵

This extravagant letter provides us with a number of key insights into the ways a viewer might have approached and conceptualized this work of art. She imagines a rich inner life for the woman in the sculpture, ascribing emotions and thoughts of sacrifice and love, while simultaneously building up a fictional past for her, filled with family and a love that she will no longer see. Although Greenwood dwells briefly upon the beauty of the sculpture, it is this imagined narrative that holds her attention, prompted by the cues derived from the pamphlet's text, assembled by Powers's friend Miner Kellogg. It is also evident that she feels herself to be entering into a dialogue about the image, not just with her friend Lynn who can now see a copy of the work in Philadelphia and share in her experiences, creating a bond between the two women who are distanced from each other. Greenwood also acknowledges that she is participating in a larger discussion about the artwork, adding her confirmation to those who have "often...remarked" on the silence that surrounds the viewing of the image. Others did note the strangeness of the aura that enveloped *The Greek Slave* when it was up for exhibition. One anonymous author claimed,

It is extremely interesting to watch the effect which the slave has upon all who come before it. Its presence is a magic circle within whose precincts all are held spell-bound and almost speechless. The gray-headed man, the youth, the matron and the maid, alike yield themselves to the magic of its power, and for many minutes gaze upon it in silent and reverential admiration, and so pure an atmosphere breathes round it that the eye of man beams only with reverent delight and the cheek of woman glows but with the fullness of emotion. Loud talking men are hushed into a silence at which they themselves wonder; those who come to speak learnedly and utter ecstasies of dilettantism slink into corners where alone they may silently gaze in pleasing penance for their audacity.¹⁰⁶

Interestingly, this author saw the sculpture as enforcing its own viewing conditions, aided by audiences who established a socially acceptable way of viewing this work in particular. *The Greek Slave* bypassed social conventions that allowed talking about art in the gallery, silencing “those who come to speak learnedly” who are forced into corners where isolation occasions silence, if awe did not. This silence may have reigned in the exhibition space, where it must have been odd in contrast to most exhibitions to occasion such remark, but as we have seen, a whirl of discourse surrounded the sculpture once people left that supposedly sanctified space.¹⁰⁷

Reading Is Seeing

During the mid-nineteenth century, more Americans were seeing more images, both at home and in increasingly diverse exhibition spaces. However, for the most part viewers still primarily encountered paintings not as prints or canvases upon the walls of their homes, but rather as text. Audiences mostly “saw” paintings not on gallery walls or even as printed engravings, but rather in the form of criticism, descriptions, and stories. Even if a viewer did finally go to see a work about which they had read, like Powers’s *The Greek Slave*, their experience would still be inescapably intertwined with the accounts they had already internalized.

Most frequently, nineteenth-century connoisseurs of art encountered the kind of material that only the hardiest of scholars are willing to trudge through today, yet by their commonplace nature in mid-century publications, it appears that they were in high demand at the time. For decades, the most recurrent form of criticism was the title list, published to accompany annual exhibitions, especially those put forth by the NAD in New York and taken up by multiple New York newspapers every year. This format offered the reader a column or two of uninterrupted text, organized by

catalogue number, giving the title or more usually simply the subject of the work on display, its artist if available, and a bit of text ranging from one word to a paragraph describing or evaluating the painting (Figure 21). Similar articles can be found from year to year, and though the newspapers that managed to stay in business changed from the NAD's first exhibition in 1825 through the decades of its heyday into the 1860s, the format of the title list notice rarely changed, save to become ever more thorough in their enumerations. In 1826 the *New-York Mirror* published only two notices highlighting only a few works from the exhibition, and by 1837 the reader could find eight installments, one published each week. Reading through these title lists, the viewer who had not attended the exhibition would receive but little information about the work. For instance, the June 3, 1837 offering from the *New-York Mirror* begins, "No. 114. Highland Scottish lake, moonlight. J.B. Kidd. Both poetical and natural." It continues to list a number of portraits by the name of the subject and artist, some with no commentary at all; one receives only the notice "A lovely picture. The hand is painted in a masterly manner." Longer descriptions usually accompany the genre and history paintings, although they highlight the subject matter and story told above all else. The same review continues, "No. 120. General Marion's Swamp encampment. For sale. J. B. White. Everything relative to Marion stirs the blood and rouzes [sic] the fancy. Mr. White has represented the patriot inviting a British officer to dine, upon the only food he partook of—sweet potatoes—and his hardy company stand around rather frowning too much on their visitor."¹⁰⁸

There is some variation, with descriptions waxing longer or being eliminated altogether; sometimes a poem or quotation is included, sometimes a past artist is referenced for comparison, and the reviewer might offer a mote of praise or censure.

The format is interesting in and of itself, however, simply because of its implications. There were two kinds of readers of these notices: those who could and/or did attend the NAD exhibitions, and those who did not. The former might read the article ahead of time, taking note of particular works he wishes to seek out, guided by the reviewer's expertise. Alternatively, he might take the newspaper along with him as a reference guide, to hold alongside or instead of the official catalogue presented with the exhibition. In this theoretical situation, he might inch his way down the wall, comparing the paintings to the brief evaluations included in the notice, perhaps reading the poems or quotations included in conjunction with the work of art.

The second reader is more interesting, the one who would not attend the exhibition, perhaps because of geographical distance—New York newspapers could be available outside the city, and literary journals like *The Literary World*, *The Knickerbocker*, and *The Crayon* also devoted time to the annual NAD exhibitions—or because of income or time restraints. His or her exposure to the year's paintings was limited to the tidbits of information provided in the text, which he might read aloud and share with a family member or friend, a common way to treat newspapers in the mid-nineteenth century. The paintings existed for this reader only in mental imaginings, a combination of his projections from the words written about them, his assumptions based on the title, and his experience of paintings, prints, and even cheap woodcuts that he had seen in the past. Using these sources, the reader could mentally reconstruct the exhibit on the gallery wall bit by bit, a world of paintings composed of nothing but text, imagination, and memory. This might seem like far-fetched extrapolation, yet it should not be as unbelievable as it sounds. Even artists did not escape this process. In Mount's diaries, he kept lists he made of potential subjects that

he might address in the future, most of which never made it even into his sketchbook. For both the artist and scholars who study him, they exist only as those titles, and yet they were not empty of meaning for either audience.¹⁰⁹

The AAU has been touted by many as one of the most democratizing forces in the mid-nineteenth century, bringing art to more people in greater quantities than ever before, especially works by genre painters like Mount and Woodville. Founded in 1839 by a group of merchants, businessmen, and artists, by the mid-1840s the AAU was the nation's premier patron for non-portrait based American art. It was a speculative venture that charged subscribers five dollars annually, for which fee they received at least one engraving; a subscription to the *Bulletin of the American Art-Union*, a magazine dedicated to keeping them informed about the institution, the art world, and contemporary ideas about art; and the chance to win an original work of art in the annual lottery sponsored by the union. The subscription fees were used by a committee of voluntary officers to purchase paintings by American artists that were displayed at the organization's Perpetual Free Gallery and then raffled off at the end of the year by lottery at a large and well-attended event. During its heyday, between 1847 and 1851, the art-union purchased almost 400 paintings annually for this purpose, and in 1849 it had almost 19,000 subscribers. Before the government forced it to stop operations in 1851 because of New York anti-lottery laws, the AAU did big business, regularly patronizing dozens of American artists and providing access to genre paintings to its subscribers across the country.¹¹⁰

Like any lottery, however, the chances that any individual subscriber might receive an original oil painting were slim, and although one might commit the five dollar fee in a moment of speculative fervor, in actuality the majority of subscribers,

especially those who did not live in New York and therefore had access to neither the Free Gallery nor the annual lottery celebration, were rewarded for their membership primarily by the annual engravings and the bimonthly *Bulletin*. The prints were large and beautifully engraved by masters in the field, and each year subscribers would receive at least one carefully selected image. By 1851, the final year of the union's distribution, members received six separate engravings, all large format and suitable for framing and display, if the owner so desired: Woodville's *Mexican News* and *Old '76 and Young '48*, Jasper Cropsey's *American Harvesting*, Mount's *Bargaining for a Horse*, William Ranney's *Marion Crossing the Pedee*, and John F. Kensett's *Mount Washington from the Valley of Conway*. Issues of the *Bulletin* also included images; each of the six issues for the year included several smaller engravings, etchings, or woodcuts that were designed to accompany the articles included in the journal. Sometimes the *Bulletin* included images designed specifically as additional independent offerings, as it did in 1851 when it offered readers "four outline drawings by Darley, upon subjects taken from American literature."¹¹¹

However, for the most part the *Bulletin* included articles, bits of art-world news, and notices about the union's business, all of which helped serve the greater purpose of the Art-Union Whiggish proprietors, improving the taste and morals of the American public and inspiring national unity through a form of cultural stewardship.¹¹² Aside from the annual prints and few illustrations in each issue, the reader's prime encounters with paintings were in the form of descriptions seen by the issue's writers, which the subscriber was never expected to actually view himself. The April 1851 issue, for instance, includes descriptions of paintings by Wilkie; works on display at the Royal Academy in London by Newenham, Creswick, Andell, Linnell,

Goodall, and Inskipp; Lessing's *Martyrdom of Huss*; various works designed to be shown at the forthcoming NAD exhibition; Sattler's cosmoramas; Woodville's *Game of Chess*, just sent home from Germany, and his *Politicians in an Oyster-Cellar*, about to be published by Goupil in Paris; sculptures underway by American artists Horatio Greenough, Hiram Powers, C. B. Ives, and John Rogers; paintings by T. Buchanan Read, an artist in Florence; and works by American artists living and working in Rome, Paris, and Düsseldorf. The issue concludes with a textual description of a new work by T. H. Matteson, a "clever picture" entitled *Justice's Court in the Backwoods*, provided by the artist:

The principal figure in the foreground is the portly justice, who is a sort of *multum in parvo*, being, in addition to his office of justice of the peace, a shoemaker—as will be perceived by his leather apron and his 'kit' of tools—and post-master—which is indicated by the post-office boxes at the left hand side of the room. The next figure of importance is the 'Pettifogger,' who is represented as an overgrown and over-green rustic dandy law student, in the act of pleading his first cause. The justice is all-absorbed, so far as so stupid and *Dogberryish* a face can be, with the pettifogger, unmindful of a lawyer on his left, who is referring him to the law in the case, which is one of assault and battery. The plaintiff is leaning upon the table, with his bruised head bound in a bandana, and listening eagerly to the argument of his juvenile advocate, while the defendant, who by his dress it will be seen is a butcher by vocation, sits disconsolate and despairing on the opposite side, while his daughter, who has been subpoenaed as a witness, is making rueful attempts at consolation. Seated directly behind the justice is the lawyer's clerk, making notes of the trial. Spectators, in various moods and attitudes, are seated and standing near the table; in the background is a group discussing the merits of the case. These are the main features. Other collaterals will be apparent when it is seen.¹¹³

This is but one example of many, where the writer (in this case the artist) is attempting to allow the reader to see his picture to the best of his ability, when the inclusion of so many images as there are works described in the issue would be prohibitively

expensive. Even the AAU, so often touted for bringing genre paintings to the attention of the populace to educate them about art, largely does so through words. For nineteenth-century art lovers, reading was seeing.

When studying this burgeoning of mid-century art criticism, scholars like David B. Dearinger have defended the critics and reviewers producing it, claiming that it is more sophisticated than historians have acknowledged. Dearinger provides an excellent overview of the types of critics writing in the middle decades of the century, as well as the periodicals where their work appeared, ranging from treatises/discourses to general-interest periodicals, specifically art-centered periodicals (ca. 1840s), more intellectual periodicals like *The Crayon* (1855-61), extremely popular journals (e.g., *Harper's*), newspapers with exhibition reviews and “art matters” sections rising especially in the 1830s, histories of American art, poetry, travel books, and guides published to accompany annual exhibitions. He argues that journalists considering the NAD annual exhibitions rarely arrived at a consensus, often expressing opposing views on such issues as the exhibitions’ success or failure. Dearinger charts a development from shorter, but still thoughtful reviews in the 1820s and 1840s through longer reviews that pay more attention to a smaller selection of artworks in the 1850s and 1860s.¹¹⁴

Nevertheless, one of the key components of those reviews never changes: the descriptive text. And rather than showing lack of sophistication on the part of reviewers in their understanding of artistic terminology or form (discussions that came to dominate art-world writing later once reproductions of images were much more common), these narrations instead served exactly their intended purpose. They (re)created the paintings for the viewer’s imagining eye, while at the same time

signaling that to both critics and viewers, it was the story that mattered most, as well as what it said about subject, artist, and nation.

Lesley Wright has also discussed the rise of narrative criticism, introducing the term “paragraph-picture” to describe what she saw as critics’ mediation between images and unsophisticated viewers. She argues that the critic writer is a kind of translator, helping the viewer make sense of works of art that otherwise were beyond their realm of experience, while simultaneously asserting that the popularization of genre painting depended on the reproducibility of genre images, since “no matter how familiar critics made the process of reading an image, the exercise was pointless without actual images for the public to see.” For Wright, “the critic, as the agent for making art accessible, mitigated any discomfort the viewer might have with unfamiliar visual art through verbal mediation”¹¹⁵

However, the critic’s role as a bringer of “demystification” was far less important than Wright suggests, for audiences were long accustomed to interpreting storytelling images from their exposure to book illustration, children’s books, and advertisements, as Chapter Four will show. Before the widespread reproduction that Wright goes on to discuss after the 1860s, there was a great deal of similar discourse about images that readers had never seen. These texts worked by calling to mind familiar scenes and imagery with words for viewers who *did not* see the works at any time, but *had* seen illustrations, read stories, and read enough criticism to have internalized the codes it presented.

Nonetheless, Wright’s term, “paragraph-pictures”—describing a picture in a paragraph—well defines exactly what most critics created when discussing art produced in the middle decades of the nineteenth-century, and what crops up again

and again while browsing periodicals and newspapers on the subject. Scholars tend to quote these paragraphs (I have done it myself) while studying specific paintings or artists, without considering the ramifications on a larger scale. As one surveys the greater production of art writing during the middle decades of the nineteenth century, it becomes quickly evident that paragraph-pictures were a key component to art criticism, and critics wrote them about works by anyone who was considered to be a major or interesting artist at the time, especially those who produced genre paintings that lent themselves so easily to this kind of storytelling.

Mount's *Winding-Up* became a paragraph-picture in the *New-York Mirror*: "The group consists of a clown, rather beyond the median of life, who has been whittling a stick—the employment painters have adopted for all Yankee clowns—while admiring, and perhaps wishing to address a beautiful girl, young enough to be his daughter....Jonathan's knife and half whittled stick is abandoned, and lies on the floor, while he sits, with crossed leg over knee, and wide-extended arms, awkwardly holding the damsel's yarn, stretching his clumsy fingers far apart to prevent its escape from his bony wrists."¹¹⁶ In this short text, the participants are enumerated and given characters and motivations, and the author points to details of the scene that he considers most important for telling the story in sequence. Literary and artistic journals were also filled with paragraph-pictures, although they devoted more space to each work under discussion, perhaps a symptom of their more limited subject-matter focus or their less frequent, weekly or monthly publication. For instance, the critic for *The Literary World*, probably Henry Tuckerman, wrote about Woodville's *Politics in an Oyster House* in 1858:

Most of our readers are probably familiar with the...benevolent looking old gentlemen...depicted in [*The Card Players*], and will be glad to

learn that we shrewdly suspect they may see him again under equally comfortable circumstances. His countenance shows him to be fond of good living, and it is not surprising that...he should partake himself to one of those subterranean temples devoted to the immolation of bivalves, served by Abyssinian priests in white robes...and vulgarly known as oyster cellars. Like a prudent man he has brought that old hooked-handled umbrella with him...[but] our old friend is not as choice as he might be in his company. You remember that hard looking youth he was playing cards with in the country, and here in the city he has fallen in with one of the same kidney...They have evidently dispatched earlier a dozen roast with exuberant trimmings, and the shells have been cleared away long ago, as you may infer from the old gentlemen's beer jug nearly empty and the segar stump which his contemporary has just discarded....This companion looks as if he was fresh from Tammany Hall of the park in the heat of a presidential canvass...he clutches a newspaper in one hand, and with the other, the elbow resting on the table, is enforcing his arguments with impressive forefinger on the old gentleman, who, a little hard of hearing, and still harder of conviction, has his hand to his ear and listens with an incredulous smile. The orator is capital and thoroughly American, as is the entire scene, an oyster cellar being one of the most 'sui generis' places which we possess, and which we are surprised has not been more frequently drawn by our humorous artists.¹¹⁷

Familiarity with Woodville's *The Card Players* could be assumed, as it was one of the membership prints distributed by the AAU in 1850, and therefore unlike most genre paintings would have had a more comprehensive viewership and could serve as a reference point. Again, this paragraph-picture touches upon the characters in the painting, the setting, their thoughts, the objects that they hold and what they say about their owners, finally focusing on the tenor of the discussion between the two men. This description *is* analysis of the painting: the critic focuses on telling gestures, prioritizes elements in the storytelling process, describes the action and interaction, and above all makes the determination that it is the story that is important to impart.

The Voice of a Generation

Storytelling was a significant part of nineteenth-century American art and culture, and therefore consideration of works that dislocate storytelling can highlight conventions through their refusal to follow them. For nineteenth-century audiences, it mattered immensely who was doing the storytelling. Being a teller of tales brought with it a kind of authority and power that, when it fell into the “wrong” hands, could make viewers uncomfortable.

In 1849, Woodville produced a work touted by the art press as a superlative example of a picture by this young artist of “genius,” a painting that was variously called an “excellent composition,” a “pleasing piece, painted in a very subdued manner,” and “one of the best works of this distinguished artist” that “abounds with feelings that will touch the hearts of all who see it.”¹¹⁸ *Old '76 and Young '48* (Figure 22) presents the homecoming of a young soldier, fresh from the battlefields of the Mexican War and bearing his arm in a sling as evidence of his involvement in the action there. He returns to the lavishly decorated home of his middle-class family and is surrounded by his sober-faced relatives, as his mother, father, little sister, family servants, and even the dog gaze intently at him and the oratorical gesture he makes, indicating he is caught in the midst of relating a tale of his adventures. Yet the young man’s gaze is firmly fixed not on his attentive auditors, but rather on his old grandfather, slumped in an armchair beside the fire and leaning heavily upon a cane—the one figure in the work who noticeably does *not* look the young hero in the eye.

The relationship between grandson and grandfather and the generational conflict it implies is clearly at the center of the painting, as indicated by the work’s title, which not so subtly asks the viewer to compare a soldier from the Revolution with one who took part in a war on a new and often controversial battlefield. Indeed,

the two figures present a study in contrasts: the rosy-cheeked young man leans eagerly forward while his wrinkled, white-haired elder slumps back; the grandson bears an injury earned through action and speaks with a firm jaw while his grandfather faces the infirmities of age, his mouth closed and collapsed around missing teeth; youth's muddied boots and edge-of-his seat position indicate his past and future engagement with the world outside, while age's slippered feet seem to be going nowhere. Physically, at least: any travelling he might be doing is purely mental, as he is transported by the story back into the past and caught between two places, incapable of fully occupying either one.

Although we would so like to call to mind scenes of happy domesticity, of telling stories around the flame-lit familial hearth and passing the torch from one generation to the next, instead this work resounds with a palpable tension, circulating around the fraught relationship between these two characters. The scene is uncomfortable, and the grandfather's hooded downward glance and the unsmiling faces of the auditors assure us that all is not well in this domestic scene. The work was engraved and distributed by the AAU to its members across the nation as part of its yearly subscription. Although the AAU's *Bulletin* pointed out the "attentive" grandfather and the listeners' "expressions of affectionate interest," a reviewer for *Graham's Magazine* in 1850 indicates that contemporary viewers also saw more than a sentimental scene of homecoming.¹¹⁹ He states: "It is in the individualities of the character as delineated in the countenances and actions of the different personages that the genius of the artist is displayed; the old man, leaning on his crutch, shaking his head with a mixed feeling of pride in his grandson's achievements, and a recollection of his own acts in the times that tried men's souls, is a triumph of the artist; the old

fellow seems to be just at the point of saying ‘O yes, my boy, all that is very well; you fought bravely, no doubt, and General Taylor was a good soldier; but it’s nothing to old ’76, and General Taylor aint Washington.’”

This critic understands the ambiguity inherent in the work, the “equivocation” that Justin P. Wolff has so rightly and thoroughly pointed out in his excellent discussion of Woodville’s painting. As both Wolff and Johns have argued, the work provides interpretive space for viewers on both sides of the controversy surrounding the Mexican War: Democrats who lauded the action and the country’s subsequent expansion as a noble continuation of the legacy of the founding fathers, and Whigs who saw the greedy imperialism as overreaching and feared the implications of bringing another slave-holding state into the Union.

Yet to understand this image, we must look beyond politics or the attitudes that conservative old ‘76ers might have towards the possible corruption of the new era. After all, war stories, especially when told within the family circle to audiences that included children, were tales, adventures, and badges of authority, experience, and wisdom, not necessarily an excuse to talk politics.

There is more to the *Graham’s* review than an acknowledgement of politics, more there than Taylor vs. Washington, or past vs. present. Although the critic accepts that the youth is the one speaking, something readily apparent from the disposition of the painting, he simply cannot resist putting words into the grandfather’s mouth, placing this obviously silenced character “just at the point of saying”...something. This projection of what happens next indicates a fundamental unease with what is going on at the present—the fact that the youth has coopted age’s

authority, rendering the grandfather impotent, not just because of his age or sickness, but because his traditional role as storyteller has been snatched away.

Another painting representing a similar moment presents a useful contrast. In *Great-Grandfather's Tale of the Revolution—A Portrait of Reverend Zachariah Greene* of 1852 (Figure 23), Mount offers viewers another generational encounter, what Wolff has called a “sentimental antidote to Woodville’s conflicted family.”¹²⁰ It is true that this idealized vision was far more typical in many ways, and for good reason, as this is a commissioned portrait, for which New York businessman Jacob Vanderhoof paid \$300 in 1852. The previous year, Mount had painted Vanderhoof and his wife Harriet, and he returned to the parlor of the family’s posh residence on Seventh Street in New York City to paint Harriet’s grandfather, the Reverend Zachariah Green of Setauket, Long Island, with his cherubic grandchildren Henry, Mary Elizabeth, and Harriet Louise.

As a family grouping depicting the trope of the storytelling grandfather surrounded by children eager to hear his stories, Mount’s painting echoes the kind of image that predominated in literature and popular print media throughout the nineteenth century. Older men identified as grandfathers gathered together collections of stories, like Grandfather Merryman’s *Juvenile Scrapbook for 1849* (Figure 24), for example, and they were invariably introduced by a frontispiece or illustration portraying the obligatory scene. Here, an older, cane-bearing gentleman, Grandfather Merryman, sits upon a bench while his young granddaughter runs to him and begs him to read to her.

This trope appears again and again in the popular fiction of the day. Each volume of the popular children’s periodical *Robert Merry’s Museum*, published from

1844, began with an image of the seated Robert Merry (Figure 25), children clustered around him, as he extols the virtues of talk and admits that even though “my hair is grizzled with years” he still loves “better to talk to youth than to others,” and the fictional Revolutionary war veteran Peter Parley, whose books skyrocketed to commercial success, was perhaps the most famous grandfatherly speaker of them all (Figure 26). Soon, even the chair in which grandfather was known to sit came to signify this experience of childish delight in stories and oral history. Nathaniel Hawthorne’s famed book, *Grandfather’s Chair*, uses the seat upon which the old man sits as a narrative device, recounting the history of the nation by tracing all those who owned, used, and changed the chair that has now come to him, the latest illustrious gent to add to its majesty. It was a culturally approved duty of the aged to pass their stories and wisdom on to the youth of the nation, and stories and storytelling were deemed particularly appropriate for this class of people. One author commented, “We dream most at the beginning and close of life: middle age is too deeply engaged in the world to give much time to dreams, however beautiful.”¹²¹

The mid-nineteenth century saw a rise in the valuation of good storytellers, possibly due to a hefty nostalgia for days preceding the print revolution, as more and more newspapers, periodicals, and books were available to replace the storytellers of old. Still, the storyteller was seen as the possessor of a great skill, someone who could call and keep attention, entertain others, and impart valuable cultural knowledge. Boston art critic Neal claimed that “all painters and sculptors, and poets and players, dancers and architects and musicians” are “nothing but *story-tellers*,” arguing that it would be impossible “for society to hold together a single hour without the help of” storytellers and storytelling.¹²² Thus, as the storytellers for the nation, the elderly held

a valued and respected role within the family, even once they had passed their physical, economic, or paternal prime.

This trope of the grandfatherly storyteller was so deeply embedded in nineteenth-century visual culture, that reviewers saw no need to comment on the generational aspect of Mount's work, unlike those who addressed Woodville's painting. Critics saw nothing unorthodox save the extra fingers on Greene's hands, until an indignant response caused the *Mirror* to print a retraction, admitting that Mount had only "followed copy" since Greene did in fact possess the extra digits and was in town to prove it at the time. The review then went on to emphasize the extreme old age of Greene, "now in the 94th year of his age" and discourse upon the most often recounted element of his life—not his family or even his decades-long ministry in Setauket, but rather that: "He was a soldier in the Revolution; an intimate friend of Gen. Washington, and one of the party who took down the equestrian statue of George III in Bowling Green. He was twice wounded—at the battle of White Marsh, near Philadelphia, and at the battle of White Plains.... He is a living chronicle of the Past; and altogether one of the most venerable relics of Revolutionary days now lingering upon the shores of Time."¹²³ In the portrait, the artist emphasized Green's connections to the nation's past through the placement of a curiously truncated bust, so shaped because it was a life mask supposedly molded on the very features of Washington himself. Greene gazes into the face of Washington, eye to eye with history and his own mortality—the president, after all, predeceased him by over 50 years.

At the end of his life, Greene was, above all else, not only a former soldier, but just as famously, a teller and re-teller of revolutionary tales. Greene wrote letters to others recounting his participation in various actions of the Continental Army; he

answered questions sent to him by people living near and far about army uniforms, army life, and what it was like knowing General Washington; he wrote his own autobiography in 1850 that dwelled at length on his revolutionary maneuvers; and differently-worded versions of the story appeared over and over, sometimes remembered by others and sometimes in the reverend's own hand, both in print and manuscripts dating from the 1840s and 1850s. The eulogist at his well-attended funeral spoke at length concerning Greene's willingness to converse on these topics:

Ask him about Dorchester or Throck's Point, White Plains or White Marsh, and he would tell them over with the pride of a veteran soldier, and with the facility of an unimpaired memory. But once speak to him about the Declaration of Independence—once ask him about the manner in which it was received by the people of the colonies, and by the army of which he was a member,—and you would touch a chord in his heart, beneath whose vibrations the aged man would quiver with conflicting emotions.... At such times, he would rise from his chair, and with kindling eye, erected form, and an impressive voice, describe how his brigade, which was encamped in the open fields lying north of Canal Street and west of Broadway, marched down, with colors flying, to the Battery... And, as if overborne by the violence of those same feelings which eighty years before had so convulsed him, he would strike his staff to the ground, exclaiming with heartfelt earnestness, *'Take care of the Union! Take care of the Union! Do no harm to the Union!'*¹²⁴

Greene was a local celebrity, much admired for his age and ties to the revolution, and he was often called on to perform old age and revolutionary identity at local spectacles, as at his 97th birthday celebration, which involved over 200 people who honored him as a "Venerable Father" and "will never forget him as the link by which, for a brief time, they bound themselves to the history of the past—to the memory of the struggles for freedom on this continent—to the vigorous men and stout hearted women who stood by Washington while he led on to victory."¹²⁵

Greene's body became a kind of index to the past, as he was most known for physically touching Washington; people who met him repeatedly marveled that they had touched "that hand which had shaken Washington's, and which was now like a connecting link between two great centuries."¹²⁶ Perhaps this is why, in Mount's portrait, so much attention is drawn to the abnormal hands of the sitter, as well as to the portrait resting upon the table to which he points, which is after all a life mask, modeled directly on the practically deified Washington's flesh, not a simple portrait bust. For columnist Hans van Spiegel, the bodies of his grandfather and the founding fathers became almost interchangeable: "Whenever I see a picture of Washington, I am reminded of my grand-father, whose dress and countenance and white hair were like what our painters delight to portray as part and parcel of 'the Father of his Country.'"¹²⁷ And so, while his great-grandson Henry acts as a scribe, preserving the story for the future, Harriet Louise stares avidly at Washington's life mask, and Mary Elizabeth takes things one step further, gazing at her great-grandfather and tenderly touching his arm, and thus linking herself to the past. The children perform three possible ways of encountering history—through written accounts, through visual representations, and through physical contact with one who lived it—while sharing a fourth by listening to his stories, in this moment when oral remembrance is transformed as history is inscribed.

Naturally, interest in the revolution and George Washington in particular was not new in the 1840s, yet as the nineteenth century progressed and the revolutionary generation aged, the public became increasingly aware that a generation of storytellers threatened to vanish, taking their stories with them. A spate of books regarding the revolution and its generals in particular rapidly appeared in print in the 1840s, with

four different multivolume, illustrated editions appearing between 1847 and 1848.¹²⁸ If the Mexican War called for inevitable comparisons, it was the increasing number of deaths that resulted in the lionization of those who remained behind, no matter how small the role they played in that originating conflict. Thus, newspapers published obituaries that included nothing more than the deceased's name, age—usually stretching into the nineties—and status as “a soldier of the revolution.” The presence of an old soldier, *any* old soldier, could produce “a thrill among the audience” of any nationalistic event, and author Eliza Leslie asserted: “A fourth of July celebration ungraced by a revolutionary warrior...is like - is like - like something flat.” Her fictional account describes how two young men, looking for a replacement for their recently deceased “old grand-daddy,” kidnap a white-haired stranger, only to be shocked when they learn he (gasp) fought for the British!¹²⁹

Greene's fame reached great heights, but even he was surpassed by Charles Carroll, publicized as “the last of the signers” of the Declaration at age 95, in 1847. Significantly, the artist Woodville was distantly related to Carroll and even named after his son-in-law's family, and thus would likely have been aware of the mass fervor surrounding the aged patriarch and his entire generation.¹³⁰

Of course, there is often a large gap between the publicly proclaimed ideal relationship towards one's elders and reality. Though some grandchildren doubtlessly sat in awe at their grandfathers' feet to hear the same stories over and over again, books and readers also included stories admonishing children, as did one article in *Robert Merry's Museum*, not to “laugh at the old man and make fun of him, or run away from him,” but instead to recognize that “the man is old, he has a great deal of wisdom, and is therefore capable of giving good advice.”¹³¹

Furthermore, the aged often occupied a precarious position in society. While Reverend Greene was lucky in that he possessed both a job (as an emeritus pastor) and family to support him to the end of his life, those who lacked either or both often had to rely on state-sponsored institutions like old-age homes or local charity, and even that was lacking more and more as the nineteenth-century progressed, since the aged were seen as unredeemable, and therefore weren't classified as part of the "worthy poor" who received charitable assistance during the Second Great Awakening, and the elderly were often viewed as inherently medically unsound.

In 1818, the federal government took steps to stave off such an ignominious fate for revolutionaries, instituting pension laws offering money to veterans who usually had to prove participation through oral testimony at a local courthouse. In part, the pension laws helped the situation and often led to an oral history of the revolution—pension hearings could become celebrations, attracting crowds to listen, and the narratives were sometimes written up and published afterwards as personal accounts, often dedicated to the writer's grandchildren. However, the pension system had a great many detractors, as the government wasn't prepared for the flood of claimants and the large sums they had to pay out, nearly \$3 million per year. Under this system, the kinds of yarn-spinning exaggerations that often were part of the oral culture could result in criminal charges, which could lead to fines for perjury or even jail time.¹³²

Men might be praised for foregoing their pensions, but far more needed it to survive, and those who could not gather enough proof of their participation were left without means. For every Greene or Carroll, there was an Isaac Rice, an octogenarian guide at Ticonderoga who once fought at the fort's garrison and lost legal title to his

pension because he lacked documentation. The 85-year-old Rice obtained “a precarious support for himself from the freewill offerings of visitors to the ruins of the fortress,” as he was left “to depend upon the cold friendship of the world for sustenance, and to feel the practical ingratitude of a people reveling in the enjoyment which his privations in early manhood contributed to secure.” Benson Lossing’s *Pictorial Sketchbook of the Revolution* of 1850 includes an illustration of this unfortunate (Figures 27-28), with his age emphasized by the feeble, shaky writing of his accompanying signature and the cane at his side—here, at least, we don’t doubt that it is needed for physical support, rather than grasped in the hand of a storyteller, a walking stick turned speaking stick.¹³³

Despite its cushioning effect, the pension system brought with it fears that revolutionary soldiers and the values they embodied would be forgotten and left to wither in impoverishment and disrespect. While the grandfather in *Old ’76 and Young ’48* doesn’t need to worry about material poverty, as evidenced by his luxurious fur robe, he bears a bit of the pensioner about him. He has lost that coveted position that Greene so heartily embodied, as an active speaker to whom others listen. Young ’48 looks eagerly to him, but seeking approval for his own accomplishments, rather than advice or a retelling of the old man’s treasured tales. Although he still sits in the highly coded armchair, it no longer affords the grandfather the privilege of authority—or authorship, as the case may be. Even though the accouterments and reminders of the revolution are present in the painting—a “rosy-cheeked” portrait of Old ’76 as a young man, a bust of Washington, a tricorne hat, and a print probably after Trumbull’s *Declaration of Independence*, they fade into obscurity in the darkened background,

unlike the grandson's uniform and weapons. Here the artist relegates Washington's bust to a dark corner, rather than giving it pride of place as in Mount's portrait.

Even when other images played out a role reversal, allowing children to step into their elders' places, the dynamic tended to be quite different. In Charles Bird King's *Grandfather's Hobby* and Thomas Sully's near-identical *Juvenile Ambition* (Figure 29), a young boy climbs up into his grandfather's chair, dons his spectacles and tricorn, and pours over a newspaper while a cane rests beside him. The transposal is rendered with humor, seen as a silly and fun-filled game of make-believe. The title pokes fun at similarities between a child's hobby-horse toy and an adult's preoccupation with his own hobby of reading the news or, in a later 1852 version of the work by King (Figure 30), interest in politics—the upside-down “Union” headline that doubtless references anxieties concerning the 1850 Compromise and the Fugitive Slave Law. Nevertheless, this painting transgresses in a lighthearted way, posing no danger to the order of things and showing no real disrespect to the wearer of that revolutionary tricorn.

In contrast, Woodville's *Old '76 and Young '48* makes visible and carries over into the visual realm all of the anxieties and critiques that surfaced as the revolutionary generation was effaced and, as some argued at the time, their accomplishments rendered moot by the immoral imperialism of the Mexican War. We are not tempted to laugh at the unsmiling faces of these characters, but rather must acknowledge that time has played out its inevitable dance, and focus shifts to the new masculine force within the family. The ticking clock centered atop the mantle, its circular shape mirroring the rounded, balding pate of the old man, emphasizes this eventuality.

Greene's habit of speaking with "a manly pride, a glowing enthusiasm, an ever-living joy" of his revolutionary days are nowhere in evidence in Woodville's grandfather.¹³⁴

Unlike Mount's culturally and personally idealized version of the relationship between age and youth, Woodville's *Old '76 and Young '48* of 1849 presents an entirely different vision, one in which focus on the "wrong" storyteller leads to the obfuscation of history as its crippled remnants are silenced and replaced. Perhaps no one is quite as silent as the third generation of the three ages of man presented here—the father, well-lit and placed prominently at the apex of the painting's central compositional triangle. What about the War of 1812, his generation's war? It received nary a mention from reviewers or even today's scholars in conjunction with this work—but that, of course, is another story.

ENDNOTES

¹ Very little has been written about *The True American*. In part, Perry's painting has been ignored to date because of a lack of historical information. While the painting is signed in the lower left corner with the monogram "EWP" and was included in a 1944 collection of Perry's works, letters, and memorabilia, it was not publicly displayed or reviewed during the artist's lifetime. Scholars have been unable to date the work with any reliability, save that it must have been completed prior to 1875 when the firm Bencke and Scott produced an unattributed chromolithograph after it (the firm submitted two impressions to the Library of Congress for copyright with the title, *The True American*, scratched out on the stone and replaced by *The Bummers*). Sandwich Historical Society, *Enoch Wood Perry, Jr.* (Center Sandwich, NH: Sandwich Historical Society, 1987); Linda Marie Jones Gibbs, "Enoch Wood Perry, Jr.: A Biography and Analysis of His Stylistic Development" (master's thesis, University of Utah, 1981); Dorothy Hesselman, "Talking It Over: A Patriotic Genre Painting by Enoch Wood Perry," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 33 (1998): 297-303; Albert Boime, *Thomas Couture and the Eclectic Vision* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 590-591; and Williams, *Mirror to the American Past*, 201. One unfinished and unpublished student paper focused on the painting in more detail: Judith F. Escover, "The True American: A True Enigma," unpublished paper, Dec. 13, 1974, for Senior Tutorial Art 199y with Mr. Kenneth Lindsay, located in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's object file. Metropolitan Museum of Art, American painting object file on *The True American*, 55.177.

² Here the artist presents us with a wry and satirical commentary on the state of affairs in America. The "true American" is headless and thus, perhaps, thoughtless; he is part of public life through his exposure to the popular press via newspapers, yet too lazy to do much other than lounge about midday on a hotel porch. The prominently placed rear ends of the figures must be remarked and certainly didn't escape the notice of nineteenth-century viewers; after all, the work was entitled "*The Bummers*" in the 1875 chromolithograph, a pun taken from popular parlance referencing both their status as loafers and vagrants, and quite likely also an allusion to their posteriors, British terminology going back to Shakespeare and beyond. It has been suggested that the satire also specifically lampoons anti-slavery advocates, as a famous newspaper entitled *The True American* was published from 1846 to 1849 in Lexington, Kentucky, and was involved in a controversy in 1845 when its owner, Cassius Clay, was forced to defend his office from violent attacks by townspeople who claimed the paper

incited abolitionist remarks. This, however, is a tenuous identification at best, as we have nothing aside from the similar masthead to identify the paper, and no evidence that Perry would have known of the scandal, which after all occurred when he was only 14 years old. He first traveled to Europe to study art in 1852 after working four years saving money working as a clerk in a grocery store in New Orleans. It seems much more likely that, like “National Hotel,” “The True American” is instead generic nomenclature allowing this work to reference any newspaper published anywhere while poking fun at nationalistic ideas of what it means to be an American.

"bum, n.1". OED Online. August 2015. Oxford University Press.

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/24630?rskey=akD7ST&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed August 22, 2015); “bummer, n. 3.” OED Online. August 2015. Oxford University Press.

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/24690?rskey=mytMmw&result=3&isAdvanced=false> (accessed August 22, 2015). Cassius M. Clay, *Appeal of Cassius M. Clay to Kentucky and the World* (Boston: J. M. Macomber, 1845); *The True American*, “The Collection Online,” The Metropolitan Museum of Art, <http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/11759> (accessed August 22, 2015).

³ Bryan Wolf, “All the World’s a Code: Art and Ideology in Nineteenth-Century American Painting,” *Art Journal* 44, no. 4 (1984): 332. This painting has also been discussed by Johns, *American Genre Painting*, 1, 122; and in Peter John Brownlee, “‘The Economy of the Eyes’: Vision and the Cultural Production of Market Revolution, 1800-1860” (Ph.D. diss., The George Washington University, 2004).

⁴ Wolff, *Richard Caton Woodville*, 107.

⁵ Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov,” in Dorothy J. Hale, Ed., *The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory 1900-2000* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).

⁶ There have been a number of excellent and informative studies on the rise of genre painting during the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Some of the most useful referenced for the purposes of this dissertation include Johns, *American Genre Painting*; Truettner, *Picturing Old New England*; Graham Corray Boettcher, *Domestic Violence: The Politics of Family and Nation in Antebellum American Art* (Yale University, 2006); Edward J. Nygren, Peter C. Marzio, and Julie R. Myers, *Of Time and Place: American Figurative Art from the Corcoran Gallery* (Washington, D.C.: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1981); and William Ayres, Ed. *Picturing History: American Painting, 1770-1930* (New York: Rizzoli, 1993).

⁷ Bruce Robertson, "Stories for the Public, 1830-1860," in *American Stories: Paintings of Everyday Life, 1765-1915*, edited by H. Barbara Weinberg and Carrie Rebora Barratt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 33.

⁸ For a more thorough discussion of this painting, see Sarah E. Boehme, "The Art of William Ranney," *American Art Review* 18, no. 3 (2006): 90-97.

⁹ This method of representing a spoken or read story inscribed in smoke or unfolding as a vision above the speaker became a typical trope in art representing storytelling. Although the sketch is beyond the chronological scope of this study, see especially Daniel Carter Beard, *The Stranger's Story*, a pen and ink drawing from 1889 held at the Library of Congress, which shows a twisting line of smoke emitting from a pipe that broadens into a smoky thought bubble portraying a scene of jousting knights. Interestingly, this smoky vision emits from the listener, not the storyteller.

¹⁰ Henry Siddons, *Practical Illustrations of Rhetorical Gesture and Action; Adapted to the English Drama: From a Work on the Subject by M. Engel, Member of the Royal Academy of Berlin* (London: Sherwood, Neely, and Jones, 1822); and Charles W. Sanders, *Sanders' School Speaker: A Comprehensive Course of Instruction in the Principles of Oratory; with Numerous Exercises for Practice in Declamation* (New York: Ivison & Phinney, 1857). For an excellent discussion of the historical interest in the representation of gestures, see Adam Kendon, *Gesture: Visible Action as Utterance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), especially Chapter Three.

¹¹ See Nancy Rash, *The Painting and Politics of George Caleb Bingham* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 107-111.

¹² See Clark, *Francis W. Edmonds*, 75-78. The painting comments through juxtaposition on the discrepancies between venerable historical artwork and cheap commercial productions and between republicanism and democracy.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹⁴ Quoted in Robertson, "Stories for the Public," 34.

¹⁵ Quoted in Don Hibbard, "American Genre Painting in Post-Civil War America: Changing American Dream," *Journal of Popular Culture* 10, no. 3 (1976): 1956.

¹⁶ Letter from Luman Reed to William Sidney Mount, July 25, 1835, reprinted in Frankenstein, *William Sidney Mount*, 69.

¹⁷ Bolton-Smith, *Lilly Martin Spencer*; and Darlene Marshall, *The Character of Home: The Domestic Interior in American Painting, 1862-1893* (Ph.D. diss., The Pennsylvania State University, 2005).

¹⁸ Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*. Howe dismisses the term “Jacksonian democracy,” at least partly because of a lack of admiration for Jackson’s persona and policies, and instead discusses this time period as one overtaken by a “communication revolution.” See also Burton J. Bledstein and Robert D. Johnston, Eds., *The Middling Sorts: Explorations in the History of the American Middle Class* (New York: Routledge, 2001); and Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

¹⁹ Johns, *American Genre Painting*.

²⁰ H. Barbara Weinberg and Carrie Rebora Barratt, Eds. *American Stories: Paintings of Everyday Life, 1765-1915* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 76.

²¹ Milton W. Brown, *One Hundred Masterpieces of American Painting from Public Collections in Washington, DC*. (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1983), 58; and Nygren, *Of Time and Place*, 8.

²² This September 1845 article is quoted in Wolff, *Richard Caton Woodville*, 12. For a more thorough discussion of Young Americans’ views on genre painting, see Edward L. Widmer, “Representation without Taxation: Art for the People,” in *Young America: The Flowering of Democracy in New York City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 125-154.

²³ For more on this topic, see Wendy Jean Katz, *Regionalism and Reform: Art and Class Formation in Antebellum Cincinnati* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2002): 3-6.

²⁴ Catherine E. Beecher, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy, for the Use of Young Ladies at Home, and at School* (Boston: Marsh, Capen, Lyon, and Webb, 1841. Unabridged reprint by New York: Source Book Press, 1970), 13.

²⁵ For instance, a *North American Review* critic commented in 1825 that *The Atlantic Souvenir* was calculated to “have so good an effect on the taste of the community, that we hope the publishers will be encouraged to continue it annually. Their aim should be, as far as possible, to enlist the best writers in different parts of the country, to procure articles on American topics, and designs of American scenery. It will thus have a character and a value peculiar to itself, and not to be found in any other works

of a similar kind.” Quoted in Fred B. Adelson, "Art under Cover: American Gift-Book Illustrations," *Magazine Antiques* 125, no. 3 (1984): 648.

²⁶ Quoted in Clark, *Francis W. Edmonds*, 23.

²⁷ Henry Nichols Blake Clark, *The Impact of Seventeenth-Century Dutch and Flemish Genre Painting on American Genre Painting, 1800-1865* (Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 1982), 204. David Wilkie’s works were beloved and much discussed in America. For more on Wilkie as a narrative painter, see Nicholas Tromans, *David Wilkie: Painter of Everyday Life* (London: Dulwich Picture Gallery, 2002); and Nicholas Tromans, *David Wilkie: The People’s Painter* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

²⁸ Quoted in B. P. J. Brooks, *Great Dutch Paintings from America* (The Hague: Mauritshuis, 1990), 24.

²⁹ Wolff, *Richard Caton Woodville*, 38-44; Brooks, *Great Dutch Paintings from America*, 24-30.

³⁰ Wolff, *Richard Caton Woodville*, 55-58; Bolton-Smith, *Lilly Martin Spencer*, 28.

³¹ Peter C. Marzio, “The Not-So-Simple Observation of Daily Life in America,” in Edward J. Nygren, Peter C. Marzio, and Julie R. Myers. *Of Time and Place: American Figurative Art from the Corcoran Gallery* (Washington, D.C.: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1981), 186.

³² Georgia B. Barnhill, “The Markets for Images from 1670 to 1790 in America,” *Imprint* 25, no. 1 (2000): 15-25.

³³ Morgan, *Protestants and Pictures*, 18.

³⁴ Ronald J. Zboray, “Antebellum Reading and the Ironies of Technological Innovation,” in *Reading in America: Literature & Social History*, edited by Cathy N. Davidson (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 188-190.

³⁵ Karen Nipps, *Naturally Fond of Pictures: American Illustration of the 1840s and 1850s* (Philadelphia: Library Company of Philadelphia, 1989), 2.

³⁶ Katz, *Regionalism and Reform*, 68.

³⁷ For more on gift books, see Adelson, "Art under Cover"; Ralph Thompson, "The 'Liberty Bell' and Other Anti-Slavery Gift-Books," *New England Quarterly* 7, no. 1

(1934): 154-68; David S. Lovejoy, "American Painting in Early Nineteenth-Century Gift Books," *American Quarterly* 7, no. 4 (1955): 345-61; Cindy Dickinson, "Creating a World of Books, Friends, and Flowers: Gift Books and Inscriptions, 1825-60," *Winterthur Portfolio* 31, no. 1 (1996): 53-66; and Kristina Huff, "Souvenirs of America: American Gift Books, 1825-1840," (PhD diss., University of Missouri, 2006).

³⁸ For further details on these New York organizations, see Clark, *Francis W. Edmonds*, 19-32; Lillian B. Miller, *Patrons and Patriotism: The Encouragement of the Fine Arts in the United States, 1790-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966); Patricia Hills, "The American Art-Union as Patron for Expansionist Ideology in the 1840s," in *Art in Bourgeois Society, 1790-1850*, edited by Andrew Hemingway and William Vaughan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Rachel N. Klein, "Art and Authority in Antebellum New York City: The Rise and Fall of the American Art-Union," *Journal of American History* 81, no. 4 (1995): 1534-1561; and Maura Lyons, *William Dunlap and the Construction of an American Art History* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005).

³⁹ Bolton-Smith, *Lilly Martin Spencer*, 13-26. The author provided no specific dates for either the exhibition at the Young Men's Mercantile Library or that at Withington's store.

⁴⁰ Tanya Pohrt, "Touring Pictures: The Exhibition of American History Paintings in the Early Republic," (PhD diss., University of Delaware, 2013).

⁴¹ E. Maurice Bloch, *George Caleb Bingham: The Evolution of an Artist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 137.

⁴² Sarah E. Worth, "Storytelling and Narrative Knowing: An Examination of the Epistemic Benefits of Well-Told Stories," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 42, no. 3 (2008): 42-56.

⁴³ Beecher, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy*, 256-257.

⁴⁴ O. S. Fowler, *Fowler on Memory: Or Phrenology Applied to the Cultivation of Memory; the Intellectual Education of Children, and the Strengthening and Expanding of the Intellectual Powers* (New York: O. S. & L. N. Fowler, 1842), 15-17.

⁴⁵ Mount in his 1859 journal, as reprinted in Frankenstein, *William Sidney Mount*, 8.

⁴⁶ Benjamin, "The Storyteller," 362.

⁴⁷ Irving, *The Sketch-Book*; Washington Irving, *A History of New York: From the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty* (Philadelphia: Bradford and Inskeep, 1809); Jeffrey Insko, "Diedrich Knickerbocker, Regular Bred Historian," *Early American Literature* 43, no. 3 (2008): 605-641; and Brian Jay Jones, *Washington Irving: An American Original* (New York: Arcade Pub., 2008).

⁴⁸ These topics are addressed in much more detail in Chapter Three. See Johns, *American Genre Painting*; and Sarah Burns, *Pastoral Inventions: Rural Life in Nineteenth-Century American Art and Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989).

⁴⁹ John Neal, "Story-Telling," *New-England Magazine* 8 (January 1835): 1.

⁵⁰ "Story Telling," *Christian Watchman* 15 (March 28, 1834): 52.

⁵¹ "Story Telling," *Philadelphia Album and Ladies Literary Gazette* 3 (Jun 18, 1828): 21.

⁵² Mrs. Seba Smith, "How to Tell a Story," *Graham's Magazine of Literature and Art* 22, no. 1 (January 1843): 33. See also "On Story-telling," *The Microscope and General Advertiser* (April 23, 1825): 52; "Story Telling," *The Ariel. A Semimonthly Literary and Miscellaneous Gazette* 3 (June 27, 1829): 37; and "How to Tell a Story," *Boston Masonic Mirror* 5 (July 6, 1833): 1.

⁵³ On the tall-tale raconteur, see James Edward Caron, "Mark Twain and the Tall Tale Imagination in Nineteenth-Century America," (PhD diss., University of Oregon, 1983), 18-64. Representations of the American grandfather as a storyteller can be found in Samuel G. Goodrich, *The Tales of Peter Parley about America. With Engravings*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Carter & Hendee, 1830); Grandfather Merryman, Ed., *The Juvenile Scrapbook for 1849; A Christmas and New Year's Present for Young People* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1849); and Helen Reeder Cross, "Peter Parley – Pied Piper in Print: Samuel Griswold Goodrich, 1793-1860" (*New-England Galaxy* 2, 1967): 3-14.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Ivan Kreilkamp, *Voice and the Victorian Storyteller* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 3.

⁵⁵ John Russell Bartlett, *Dictionary of Americanisms: A Glossary of Words and Phrases, Usually Regarded as Peculiar to the United States* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2003 [first published in 1848]).

⁵⁶ Frederic Saunders, "The Talkative and the Taciturn," *Odd-Fellows' Offering for 1852* (New York: Edward Walker, 1851), 258-272.

⁵⁷ "Story-Tellers," *Littell's Living Age* 2 (August 17, 1844): 72.

⁵⁸ Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth-Century America*, 150-151.

⁵⁹ Quoting de Tocqueville in William C. Davis, "'Taking the Stump': Campaigning in Old-Time Kentucky," *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 80, no. 4 (1982): 370.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 376; quoting from David Crockett, *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett of the State of Tennessee* (Philadelphia, 1834).

⁶¹ Quoted in Scott Casper, "Politics, Art, and the Contradictions of a Market Culture: George Caleb Bingham's 'Stump Speaking,'" *American Art* 5, no. 3 (1991): 40.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Quoted in John Conron, *American Picturesque* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 111-112.

⁶⁴ Debby Applegate, "Henry Ward Beecher and the 'Great Middle Class': Mass-Marketed Intimacy and Middle-Class Identity," in *The Middling Sorts: Explorations in the History of the American Middle Class*, edited by Burton J. Bledstein and Robert D. Johnston (New York: Routledge, 2001): 120-121.

⁶⁵ Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth-Century America*, 59-61.

⁶⁶ For more on the intertwinement of American life and rhetorical theory and practice and the role of the orator in politics and both public and private self-representation, see Jay Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language, and the Culture of Performance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).

⁶⁷ Warren Burton, *The District School as It Was by One Who Went to It* (New York: J. Orville Taylor, 1838), 68-69.

⁶⁸ Bolton-Smith, *Lilly Martin Spencer*, 27.

⁶⁹ Thomas C. Leonard, "News at the Hearth: A Drama of Reading in Nineteenth-Century America," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 102, part 2 (1993): 379-401.

⁷⁰ For more details, see Mary Foley, "Fitz Hugh Lane, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and the Gloucester Lyceum," *American Art Journal* 27 (1995/1996): 99-101; Mary Kupiec Clayton, "The Making of an American Prophet: Emerson, His Audiences, and the Rise of the Culture Industry in Nineteenth-Century America," *The American Historical Review* 92, no. 3 (1987): 597-620; and Angela G. Ray, *The Lyceum and Public Culture in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2005).

⁷¹ Brian W. Dippie, "Green Fields and Red Men," in *George Catlin and His Indian Gallery*, edited by George Gurney and Therese Thau Heyman (Washington, DC: Smithsonian American Art Museum, 2002), 27.

⁷² Quoted in Benita Eisler, *The Red Man's Bones: George Catlin, Artist and Showman* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2013), 165-168.

⁷³ "Catlin's Indian Gallery," *Commercial Advertiser* (September 23, 1837).

⁷⁴ Quoted in Eisler, *The Red Man's Bones*, 217-220.

⁷⁵ "Catlin in His Glory!" *Albany Evening Journal* (October 26, 1837), 2

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ "The Red Men," *Daily Herald and Gazette* (November 2, 1876).

⁷⁸ "Catlin's Indian Gallery," *Morning Herald* (November 28, 1837).

⁷⁹ "Remember the Poor," *New-York Spectator* (February 26, 1838); and "Multiple News Items," *Morning Herald* (February 28, 1838).

⁸⁰ The broadside is reproduced in Dippie, "Green Fields and Red Men," 53.

⁸¹ "The Largest Painting in the World," *The Boston Daily Atlas* (December 15, 1846).

⁸² Stephan Oettermann, *The Panorama: History of a Mass Medium* (New York: Zone Books, 1997), 327-328. This work is treated extensively in Nnette Luarca-Shoaf, *The Mississippi River in Antebellum Visual Culture* (PhD diss., University of Delaware, 2012). The panorama had a long and varied history before Banvard's appeared for public view. For an extremely thorough discussion of the panorama's history and the display of panoramas, both moving and in the round, for American audiences, see Oettermann.

⁸³ D. C. H., “Wonderful! Wonderful,” *The Boston Daily Atlas* (December 29, 1846).

⁸⁴ Ralph Hyde, *Panoromania! The Art and Entertainment of the ‘All-Embracing’ View* (London: Trefoil Publications, 1988), 133.

⁸⁵ “Another of Banvard’s Stories,” *Pensacola Gazette* (May 27, 1848).

⁸⁶ Quoted in Oettermann, *The Panorama*, 329.

⁸⁷ *Description of Banvard’s Panorama of the Mississippi River, Painted on Three Miles of Canvas: Exhibiting a View of Country 1200 Miles in Length, Extending from the Mouth of the Missouri River to the City of New Orleans; Being by Far the Largest Picture Ever Executed by Man* (Boston: John Putnam, 1847). This booklet resides in the archives of Winterthur Museum and Country Estate, and all of the following quotations derive from this unpaginated text.

⁸⁸ *Description of Banvard’s Panorama of the Mississippi River*. The text is unpaginated.

⁸⁹ Frankenstein, *William Sidney Mount*, 16.

⁹⁰ Nemerov, “The Pleasure of Conversation.”

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁹² Ayres, *Picturing History*, 17; and Henry James, *A Small Boy and Others* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1913), 268.

⁹³ James, *A Small Boy and Others*, 268; and David Hackett Fischer, *Washington’s Crossing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 3.

⁹⁴ Quoted in William T. Oedel and Todd S. Gernes, “The Painter’s Triumph: William Sidney Mount and the Formation of a Middle-Class Art,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 23, no. 2 (1988): 112.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Theodore E. Stebbins, Melissa Renn, Virginia Anderson, Kimberly Orcutt, and Ross Barrett, “Johannes Adam Simon Oertel (1823-1909),” in *American Paintings at Harvard*, vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 358-365.

⁹⁷ Erika Schneider, *The Representation of the Struggling Artist in America, 1800-1865* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2015), 100-102.

⁹⁸ For an excellent discussion of this time period, see Sarah Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist: Art and Culture in Gilded Age America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

⁹⁹ “The Fine Arts. National Academy of Design,” *The New-York Mirror: A Weekly Gazette of Literature and the Fine Arts* (May 14, 1831), 8, 45.

¹⁰⁰ Joy S. Kasson, *Marble Queens and Captives: Women in Nineteenth-Century American Sculpture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 55.

¹⁰¹ *Boston Daily Advertiser* (June 27, 1848), quoted in Vivien M. Green, “Hiram Powers’s ‘Greek Slave:’ Emblem of Freedom,” *American Art Journal* 14, no. 4 (1982): 33. Green examines responses to *The Greek Slave* in the context of the 1821-1830 Greek War of Independence and the abolitionist movement in America.

¹⁰² “New-York Correspondence,” *Daily National Intelligencer* (August 25, 1847).

¹⁰³ “To the Greek Slave by Powers,” *The Literary World* (September 18, 1847).

¹⁰⁴ Henry T. Tuckerman, “The Greek Slave,” *New York Daily Tribune* (September 9, 1847); and Mary Irving, “The Greek Slave,” *The Independent* (September 11, 1851).

¹⁰⁵ Grace Greenwood, “Letter XII,” in *Greenwood Leaves: A Collection of Sketches and Letters* (Boston: Ticknor, Reed, and Fields, 1853). “Grace Greenwood” was the pseudonym of Sara Jane Clarke Lippincott, the well-educated daughter of a physician who contributed to *Godey’s Lady’s Book* and wrote short poems published in newspapers and literary journals. For more information on Clarke, see “Greenwood, Grace (Sara Jane Clarke Lippincott),” *The Cambridge Guide to Women’s Writing in English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

¹⁰⁶ “The Greek Slave,” *The Courier and Enquirer*, New York (August 31, 1847).

¹⁰⁷ I have provided only a few examples of published responses to the sculpture in the interest of brevity, but hundreds were produced in only a few short years. For a different sampling, see Kasson, *Marble Queens and Captives*, 51-72.

¹⁰⁸ “The Fine Arts. National Academy of Design. Sixth Notice,” *The New-York Mirror* (June 3, 1837).

¹⁰⁹ The following appears in Mount's diary in December of 1844. "Two lovers walking out./Walking out after marriage, one after the other, after the manner of Jude and Sam./The husband two months after marriage, with a bag of grain on his shoulder going to mill./A Whig after the Election./A Clergyman looking for a sermon at the bottom of his barrel./A Negro fiddleing on the crossroads on Sunday./Kite broke loose./Claming and fishing./A Farmer feeding hogs./Officeholder./Croton Water./Land Mark, or strengthen the Memmory./Creeping for a wood chuck./Please to give me a penny./Cold victuals./Blowing rocks./A Group listening to the Grand Spy./~~Have you an ax to grind (Who'll turn grindstone).~~/The Tribune in the Country./Curtain lecture./A poor widow about to part with relics of better days in order to supply bread for her starving Children./Entertaining a Clergyman./Boys listening to an old Veteran fifer./A short history of Mr. Dignity./Camp Meeting./Last of the Montauks./A poor Artist sketching his foot, while his wife is busy washing *his* shirt./Stony Brooke was Wopowog./An effort to reach an enemy." Frankenstein, *William Sidney Mount*, 130.

¹¹⁰ Klein, "Art and Authority in Antebellum New York City," 1534-1535. The customer base of the American Art-Union was originally primarily local to New York, but roving field agents traveled to recruit new members, so it quickly became national. For an excellent discussion of the Art-Union as a speculative business enterprise, see Peter John Brownlee, "Francis Edmonds and the Speculative Economy of Painting." *American Art* 21, no. 3 (2007): 30-53.

¹¹¹ "The Bulletin for the Year 1851," *Bulletin of the American Art-Union*, no. 1 (1851): 1.

¹¹² Klein, "Art and Authority in Antebellum New York City."

¹¹³ "The Bulletin for the Year 1851," *Bulletin of the American Art-Union*, no. 1 (1851): 16.

¹¹⁴ Dearinger's discussion of criticism and reviewers is endlessly helpful. For further details, please see Dearinger and Berman, *Rave Reviews*. Although she focuses on art criticism following the Civil War and moving forward into the twentieth century, J. M. Mancini also provides insights into earlier art criticism. Mancini, *Pre-Modernism*.

¹¹⁵ Lesley Carol Wright, "Men Making Meaning in Nineteenth-Century American Genre Painting, 1860-1900," (Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1993), 111-114.

¹¹⁶ *New-York Mirror* (December 24, 1838); also quoted in Sarah Burns, "Yankee Romance: The Comic Courtship Scene in Nineteenth-Century American Art," *The American Art Journal* 18, no. 4 (1986): 69.

¹¹⁷ This review from the September 27, 1858 issue of *The Literary World* is quoted in Wolff, *Richard Caton Woodville*, 72. See Dearinger, *Rave Reviews*, Chapter Three, for identification of the critics writing for the various newspapers and periodicals.

¹¹⁸ Quoted in Wolff, *Richard Caton Woodville*, 117.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 126.

¹²¹ Grandfather Merryman, *The Juvenile Scrapbook for 1849*, iii-iv; Robert Merry's *Museum: Volumes I. II.* (Boston: Bradbury & Soden, 1842), 10-11; Goodrich, *The Tales of Peter Parley about America*; Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Famous Old People: Being the Second Epoch of Grandfather's Chair*, second edition (Boston: Tappan & Dennet, 1842); and R. S. W., "The Phases of Life," *The Ladies' Repository: A Monthly Periodical, Dedicated to Literature, Art, and Religion* 11 (February 1851), 71.

¹²² Neal, "Story-Telling."

¹²³ "Chapter XXXVIII: Rev. Zachariah Greene's Latest Portrait—His List of His Fellow Patriarchs in the Setauket Parish," photocopy from Edward Buffet Scrapbook (MMA collection), in Metropolitan Museum of Art Object File for William Sidney Mount's *Great-Grand-Father's Tale of the Revolution—A Portrait of Reverend Zachariah Greene*, 1852, oil on canvas, 24 x 20 in.; 1984.192.

¹²⁴ Benjamin F. Thompson, *The History of Long Island; from its Discovery and Settlement, to the Present Time. With Many Important and Interesting Matters; Including Notices of Numerous Individuals and Families; also a Particular Account of the Different Churches and Ministers*, Vol. 1 (New York: Gould, Banks & Co., 1843).

¹²⁵ Incomplete clippings from *Sunday Eagle*, February 22, 1880, in Metropolitan Museum of Art Object File for William Sidney Mount's *Great-Grand-Father's Tale of the Revolution—A Portrait of Reverend Zachariah Greene*, 1852, oil on canvas, 24 x 20 in.; 1984.192.

¹²⁶ John Ordronaux, *Eulogy on the Life and Character of Rev. Zachariah Greene, A Patriot of the Revolution, and Late Senior Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Setauket, N.Y., Delivered at the Request of the Citizens of Hempstead, February 10th, 1859* (New York: Baker & Godwin, Printers, 1859), 36-37.

¹²⁷ Hans von Spiegel, "My Grandfather's House," *The Knickerbocker; or New York Monthly Magazine* 25, no. 5 (May 1845): 441.

¹²⁸ Two examples include J. T. Headley, *Washington and His Generals*, 2 vols. (New York: Baker and Scribner, 1848); and Charles J. Peterson, *The Military Heroes of the Revolution: With a Narrative of the War of Independence* (Philadelphia: William A. Leary, 1848).

¹²⁹ Edward Tang, "Writing the American Revolution: War Veterans in the Nineteenth-Century Cultural Memory," *Journal of American Studies* 32, no. 1 (1998): 68.

¹³⁰ George Lippard, "The Last of the Signers," *Maine Farmer* (Oct. 14, 1847): 4.

¹³¹ "Old Age," *Robert Merry's Museum: Volumes V. VI.* (Boston: Bradbury, Soden & Col, 1844), 123-124.

¹³² Tang, "Writing the American Revolution," 68-69.

¹³³ Benson J. Lossing, *Pictorial Field Book of the Revolution; or, Illustrations, by Pen and Pencil, of the History, Scenery, Biography, Relics, and Traditions of the War for Independence*, No. 2 (New York: Harper & Brothers, ca. 1850), 121-122.

¹³⁴ Ordranax, *Eulogy on the Life*, 23.

Chapter 3

THE LOOK OF LISTENING: THE ORAL AND THE AURAL IN THE WORKS OF WILLIAM SIDNEY MOUNT

A Conversation Piece

In the summer of 1836, Robert Gilmor, Jr. of Baltimore contacted the Long Island-based artist William Sidney Mount, requesting that he complete a painting “of cabinet size.” The painting was therefore likely destined for private contemplation in the parlor or study of Mount’s patron, a self-professed connoisseur, who claimed that he could “instantly on entering a room point out even from the door all the principal pictures.”¹ However, the artist would choose the content of the picture at his discretion, or as he put it in a return letter to Gilmor, “the subjects left entirely to my own fancy.”² Mount, who by this time was already known within the American art world for his paintings set in the humble homes and public houses of Long Island, sent back to Gilmor *The Tough Story: Scene in a Country Tavern* (a painting more commonly known to modern scholars as *The Long Story*, a title later appended to the work) (Figure 31). Gilmor had seen other works by Mount in the collection of Luman Reed, the wealthy New York entrepreneur and avid patron of the arts, who highly valued the artist’s work for its narrative capacity.³ In July of 1835, Reed wrote to Mount, “your truth of expression and natural attitudes are to me perfectly delightful, and really every day Scenes where the picture tells the story are the kinds most pleasing to me and must be to every true lover of the Art.”⁴ Encouraged by his patrons’ attention to his ability to construct a story out of paint, and given leeway by Gilmor to represent a scene of his choosing, the artist focused on an anecdote that

touched upon many of the issues he himself must have faced when composing a picture: storytelling in action.

The Tough Story pictures a dimly lit and sparsely furnished room. Three men gather closely around a box stove. This is a public tavern, not the family hearth, and all the accouterments of male conviviality are present: liquor warms in a pitcher atop the stove, smoke curls from a clay pipe, and cards spill from a hat resting on the floor at left. However, the cards lie unremarked, and the men's attention is riveted, not on the fire, drink, or tobacco, but rather on a much more ephemeral, and even to some extent unrepresentable, act that dominates the picture. As surely as heat blazes from the coals of the stove, words flow from the speaker on the left, who gestures with an extended finger to emphasize his point. His chief listener leans in to hear. This tidily dressed and coifed fellow hunches on his stool with hand braced on an outstretched leg. The other man, who still wears his hat and his darkly enveloping cloak, is an enigmatic presence, one identified by Alfred Frankenstein as the "Mount Mysterious Stranger—a man...who stands apart from the activities of the depicted group, looks on, but does not participate."⁵

For Frankenstein, this stranger stands in for the artist's sense of alienation from the people around him. Frankenstein argues that Mount experienced a constant conflict between the city of his artistic life, which could be dirty and crowded with rude people, and the country where he owned property and painted but felt psychologically isolated by country dwellers' indifference to art. But there is another way to understand this figure: he participates wholly in the action despite his lack of visual address—he presents a vivid picture of the avid listener, even an eavesdropper. Although his eyes and body are obscured as he turns from the speaker to warm his

rear, our attention is fixed by the positioning of his head and prominent ear, cocked slightly towards the speaker. He *listens*. This is significant within the art of Mount, whose paintings so often emphasize the gaze and its direction: here looking is secondary to hearing and listening. Instead it is sound that links this trio of men, and the story itself becomes the binding element. The chasm between the figures, emphasized by the stark divisive line of the stovepipe, separates the space of orality, or speaking, on the left from the space of aurality, or listening, on the right. These two modes are often treated as one event, and indeed the words themselves are homophones, easily mistaken for each other when they trip off the tongue. In fact, each is pointless without the other, as a speaker demands a listener and vice versa. However, here Mount is careful to distinguish between the two activities, as each is awarded a separate space and function within the painting. The viewer is thus thrown into a rich space of duality, ping-ponging back and forth between these two realms, able to cast himself as either storyteller or audience, for he engages in both behaviors. The artist has even left a vacant space between the speaker and his chief auditor, opposite the “mysterious” man: as if the viewer could at any moment pull up a chair and take his place as another fellow listener warming his feet by the coals.

Through its focus on speaking, listening, and the attention-engaging process of storytelling, Mount’s *The Tough Story* draws the viewer into a relationship with the work and its depicted characters. The artist represents speech itself and the acts of speaking and listening as vital aspects of the fine art of storytelling in the nineteenth century. This representation turns a visual process of *looking* into one of imagined, remembered, or actual *listening*, as the viewer attempts to articulate the story aloud for himself and any fellow viewers. Of course the artist, through his use of title and

telling details within the work, provided guidance as to the subject of the spoken story: for instance, a notice nailed to the back wall advertises the Long Island Railroad establishing setting and inviting contemplation of technologies of travel, and bandages around the head and knee of the speaker lead to speculation as to his history. However, the painting nevertheless presents viewers with a moment in which they themselves become the storytellers, as they draw upon their experiences to imagine the type of story that might arise in such circumstances. Mount pointedly leaves much of this up to the viewer's discretion. The faces of the characters in the work are curiously blank; unlike many genre paintings, where facial expressions are almost caricatures of surprise, skepticism, or absorption, here Mount leaves the viewer room to fit the circumstances to his or her own story.

In a sense, the painting functions as a self-conscious reflection upon the artist's own practice. In conceiving of a work of storytelling as a process involving both an enthusiastic originator and an attentive audience, Mount was telling a story in paint. While his tools are different from those of the depicted narrator, it is not so difficult to imagine a brush in the hand of the storyteller, or words in the mouth of Mount, as he conceptualized how his subject would appear on the canvas before him. Indeed, the artist would do just that, transform his visual image into words, when he later wrote to Gilmor to describe the concatenation of painted events. By painting a work that dwells on the art form of constructing stories, the artist offers his viewers not just a chance to laugh at the humorous figures included (who are so distant in their countrified ways from sophisticated art patrons like Gilmor, who had been to Europe and filled his house with works by masters old and new); rather, in providing an opportunity for the viewer to imagine the story being told, the painting self-

consciously focuses on the mechanics of storytelling. The painted figures occupy a stage-like setting, with the wooden floorboards tilting up from the foreground to create a narrow space with a uniform light source that sharply illumines the included figures, rather like dramatic stage lighting. Unlike the setting of a print by Hogarth or the style that typifies the many seventeenth-century Dutch genre paintings owned by Gilmor, this scene is stark in its simplicity, with no extraneous figures included.⁶ Instead, the picture plane consists primarily of a pyramidal composition, encapsulating the three monumental figures, their stove and belongings, and the paper notices nailed to the wall behind them. Because there are so few compositional distractions, those that *are* there rise to higher significance. In Mount's fabrication, storytelling thus ideally consists of the author of a work, a small but attentive audience, and the inclusion of a number of closely painted, highly descriptive, and often quite loaded details.

In a review published upon the appearance of *The Tough Story* at the annual NAD exhibition in 1838, the reviewer took great care in his mention of Mount's work, which merited longer consideration than any other work on view, many of which received such brief notices as "not beyond mediocrity," "very fair," and "showing great improvement." He called the painting "the jewel of the exhibition—original, characteristick and full of life and meaning." Although he also praised the artist's painting techniques, significantly the reviewer focuses on Mount's storytelling as the key aspect deserving of accolade. He writes, "His great aim is to tell history in the most forcible and familiar manner. To this end, colour, light and shade, and composition, are all made to bend.... Mount gives not even the handle of a cup unless it is to carry on and finish his story."⁷

In his letter to Gilmor, Mount noted that he designed the work as a “conversation piece.”⁸ Here the term is used not in the conventional sense of mid-eighteenth-century portraiture, to indicate a casually posed group portrait, but rather because it is a work about discourse and its effects, and significantly, because it also was designed to inspire conversation among viewers.⁹ Even those who tried to resist discussion floundered: one reviewer claimed that *The Tough Story* “needs no comment,” only to provide some immediately: “the beauties are developed to all who will look, and within the comprehension of the weakest intellect. This is great praise, but none too high for its merits. Yet it is really provoking to hear the many remarks that are made on this, one of the simplest and strongest efforts of genius.”¹⁰ This indicates that many people discussed the work, placing it at the center of “many remarks” by viewers that could be heard, either in the gallery space itself or about town. This painting about speech occasioned quite a bit of talk of its own.

The Tough Story thematizes processes of speaking, listening, and storytelling, visualizing an ineffable and transient moment and transforming one sensual experience into another. Sound of various types was often at the center of works by Mount, and he was particularly interested in speech and storytelling and its operations. Although we have little hope of actually reconstructing the conversations and storytelling that might have occurred in front of the painting as it hung on gallery or parlor walls, written evidence nonetheless provides an understanding of viewers’ thoughts. Mount’s works often served as the nexus of a barrage of narratives that surrounded them, and critics, professional fiction writers, amateur poets, and the artist himself imagined and wrote stories about the paintings. Viewers often saw these paintings within a realm of whirling words, whether spoken, read, or heard. *The*

Tough Story was designed to inspire conversation and visualization of the painted story. Its title prods the viewer in a particular direction, affecting his interpretation through its reference to a large and particular body of discourse, one that required sophisticated interaction between tellers and listeners and straddled the line between what we might consider high and low artistic production. Viewers and authors wrote about *The Tough Story*, and those stories inspired other productions in multiple media. Consideration of this painting leads to the understanding that the visual was deeply embedded in a culture of orality and text on multiple levels, and the phenomenological ways in which images were encountered combined with viewers' experiences to render them more informed storytellers. Paintings representing storytelling also provided artists an opportunity to meditate upon their own role as constructors of visual stories. Such images could serve in many ways as meta-paintings, as artist and viewers engaged in a dialogic interaction, each contributing to the story being told.

Tough Stories and Tall Talk

In his 1883 autobiography, *Life on the Mississippi*, Mark Twain attacked the significance of an artwork's title with deft humor. Upon seeing E. D. B. Julio's *The Last Meeting of Lee and Jackson* (Figure 32), Twain wrote:

Like many another historical picture, it means nothing without its label. And one label will fit it as well as another: First Interview between Lee and Jackson. Last Interview between Lee and Jackson. Jackson Introducing Himself to Lee. Jackson Accepting Lee's Invitation to Dinner. Jackson Declining Lee's Invitation to Dinner—with Thanks. Jackson Apologizing for a Heavy Defeat. Jackson Reporting a Great Victory. Jackson Asking Lee for a Match.¹¹

Although Twain neglects all the other signifiers in a painting that indicate the tenor of the action, he points out the various possible interpretations and how drastically title

can affect the narrative a viewer assigns to an artwork. In Mount's painting, the title significantly affects our interpretation of the scene and its characters, and Mount originally referred to this painting by that title. But what exactly is a "tough story," and why does it matter?

A tough story was a tale exaggerated to the point of ridiculousness. It relied heavily on the pretense of truth, and it required a skilled teller to maintain a mien of seriousness even while he employed his "magnifying, expanding, enlarging, exaggerating, and piling-it-on-thick powers," as a contemporary journal suggested.¹² More familiar to us now as tall tales, these tough stories often were present within the popular fiction of the 1830s and 1840s, particularly after the publication of *Tough Yarns: A Series of Naval Tales and Sketches to Please All Hands* and its acclaimed reception in the United States during 1835.¹³ Such yarns ranged from long-winded, digressive stories published in book form or in literary magazines, to shorter, one-line notices found in major newspapers or magazines devoted primarily to agriculture or humor, like *Spirit of the Times* or *The New England Farmer*.¹⁴ The earliest so-called tough stories were essentially fish stories recounted by sailors, and in later decades they came to encompass many of the tall tales of the American southwest, like the kinds of bear-killing stories found in the incredibly popular "The Big Bear of Arkansas," first published in the *Spirit of the Times* in 1841 by its author Thomas Bangs Thorpe.¹⁵

Although some viewed them as a form of low humor, steeped in bizarre configurations of dialect and regional wit, other publications pointed repeatedly to the level of sophistication necessary for both teller and audience. One author lambasted the naïve listener who, "instead of believing it, or laughing at it as a joke, would only

gravely reply, ‘That’s more than I can *swallow*.’”¹⁶ Despite the absence of recordings of actual speech from the middle of the nineteenth century, it is nevertheless apparent from those written tough yarns that these stories were an unmitigatedly oral practice, relying heavily on audience participation and interaction with the storyteller. An appropriate response to a ‘lie’ told by such a storyteller might include “a whew! or a whistle, proportioned in intensity to the enormity of the offence.”¹⁷ Alternatively, one might attempt to push the exaggeration even further. In response to a tough yarn “spun by ‘a celebrated Admiral’” detailing how, after a storm hit a ship carrying hosiery, they “observed all the porpoises next morning wearing red night-caps,” one listener, “determining not to be outdone, replied that that was by no means remarkable, for that a vessel he was in had, on a similar occasion, lost her main-topsail, and that next morning they saw a whale scudding along with the canvass tied round its neck by way of a cravat.”¹⁸ The goal here is to recognize the first story as a lie, but rather than announcing it as such, to perpetuate the humor of the fiction by topping it with an even bigger fish story.

In order for a tough story to come across as a good one, “a really tough one—a hard-shelled one, done to a regular ‘brown’—such as taxes credulity to the utmost,” the storyteller must possess a certain level of skill and judgment of his audience.¹⁹ In this context, a story was tough because it was so well-done, so overcooked and exaggerated beyond the realms of credulity. A story needed great absurdity in order to avoid the possibility of resulting in a “bad” embarrassed story teller. A good teller of stories could acquire a reputation as “somewhat famous for his tremendously tough yarns,” praised both for the “absurdity” of his story, “as well as the confident air in which he delivered it.”²⁰ Similarly, audience members required a skill set to

participate in the tall talk culture. In an account of the telling of an alligator story, the pseudonymous author Olive Branch identifies two types of audience members: 1) the storyteller's friend Tom, who knows the culture, yarns a bit himself, and eggs on the teller, asking questions to help progress the story to bigger and bigger exaggerations; and 2) a traveling writer (and the butt of the joke, perhaps because he foolishly wastes his time with text when orality is the realm of these storytellers) who takes the yarn for truth and asks questions to verify it, rather than responding to it as fiction or entertainment.²¹ Such overly serious figures are mocked, but they become a standard device in these stories about narration, as a foil to teach readers how to respond appropriately to the situation. Of course, humorists were ever sly contortionists in the pursuit of their art, and sometimes they twisted the tropes in order to stretch the joke further, as in a response published by "Connecticut Boy" to a notice he saw in a newspaper about a valuable cow noted for producing 499 pounds of butter and 1,254 pounds of cheese in the course of nine months. He puzzles over the situation, attempting to reason it through by calculating the average production of cows, thinking about types of cheese, and weighing the amount of buttermilk and whey that might be produced—obviously all a ridiculous exercise designed to garner laughs.²²

Tough stories were so popular throughout the 1830s and 1840s that they began to take on regular patterns, mocking silly behaviors among country "rubes," or exaggerating wildly about animals, hunting, or courtship. Significantly, when written or published, they were almost invariably cast in the form of frame tales told in moments when filling time was necessary, as during travel when duration was key to the narrative experience and structure, where the storyteller bears as much (or more) importance as the yarn he tells. In 1833, the New York-based magazine *Spirit of the*

Times published a purported letter about a famed storyteller, Colonel Wanderwell, who “is a very lively speaker, and tells his stories with a degree of animation quite uncommon in a story teller of his years; looking you steadily in the eyes, and always holding up and shaking at you the fore finger of his right hand, when narrating such particulars as are most interesting—to himself, laying at the same time a strong emphasis on many of his words, dividing them into syllables, and giving each a deliberate, forcible utterance, so as to eject them from his lips with a powerful champaign [sic] explosion.”²³

Although there is no proof that Mount read this particular story, there is ample evidence that he was familiar with the genre. From time to time he received the sort of periodicals that published tough stories, including one Luman Reed sent directly to him because it bore a story inspired by his earlier painting, *Bargaining for a Horse*.²⁴ In *The Tough Story*, his storyteller bears some resemblance to the characterization of Wanderwell; he leans forward with his hooded gaze directed squarely into his auditor’s eyes, and his hand echoes Wanderwell’s gesture. Indeed, Mount was fond enough of such tough stories that he took the time in an autobiographical sketch to relate one:

Brother Henry told me the following—he called to see Inslee one sunday unexpectedly. The visit was longer than both expected and at the same time a mysterious commotion in the dinner pot hanging over a blazing fire attracted his attention. Inslee looked settled. The talk continued. Again the noise was unaccountable and the pot lid was greatly agitated, and before Inslee could reach the tongs to keep the cover in its place out jumps three turtles one after the other all sprawling to the hearth. Henry said he laughed until he had a paine in his side, and the way those turtles scambled over the floor was a caution to all creeping things.²⁵

The mid-nineteenth century saw a rise in the cultural valuation of good storytellers, possibly due to a hefty nostalgia for days preceding the print revolution in the antebellum period, as more and more newspapers, periodicals, and books were available to replace the storytellers of old. Even the renowned Boston art critic John Neal published an encomium to storytelling, in 1835, claiming that “all painters and sculptors, and poets and players, dancers and architects and musicians” are “nothing but *story-tellers*,” arguing that it would be impossible “for society to hold together a single hour without the help of” storytellers and storytelling.²⁶ In an age of print, it was the orality of a story that mattered most. Dialect was king, whether the nasal tones of a Yankee storyteller or the long drawl of a frontiersman. Stories and books were often read aloud, a practice encouraged among all audiences, from children to adults. Indeed, even today when we have shifted primarily to a mode of silent reading, some such stories must be read aloud or slowly mentally enunciated in order to interpret the thick dialect.

Of course, a question remains: why would Mount, an artist who worked so diligently to achieve membership in the NAD and courted some of the most elite patrons of the day, including Gilmor and Reed, choose to represent the telling of a tough story? A renowned storyteller himself, Mount selected as his subject one of the more controversial aspects of storytelling practice, telling a tough story, which embodied many of the qualities so derided by critics who railed against novels. The domestic doyenne Catherine Beecher, for instance, advised that young children “ought not to be allowed” to read such exciting works as novels, “except those of dull and phlegmatic temperament, until the solid parts of education are secured, and a taste for more elevated reading acquired. If these stimulating condiments in literature are

freely used in youth, in a majority of cases all relish for more solid reading will be destroyed.”²⁷ As novels gained in popularity throughout the course of the nineteenth century, critics increasingly pointed to them as degrading moral influences that should be avoided, particularly by impressionable audiences like women and children. Even defenders of novels were careful to cavil at a work that “was anything but true to nature” and which fed the mind “particularly that which is not cultivated” and which “hankers after novelty,” even when it comes in the form of “ill-directed storytelling” that injures the mind.²⁸ Critics derided novel reading for “giving false views of life,” encouraging people to make “invidious comparisons” when they turn from the scenes of fiction to the dull realities of life; furthermore, they lambasted novels for encouraging “great waste of time,” during which “the confirmed novel reader can sit for hours over the bewitching pages, and never heed their flight.”²⁹ The Reverend J. T. Crane went so far as to claim that only “TOTAL ABSTINENCE” would suit, comparing them to addictive drugs, as a novel wastes time, injures the mind, makes people unfit for real life, “creates an overgrowth of the passions,” lessens the reader’s “horror of crime and wickedness,” and is “totally at variance with Scriptural piety.”³⁰

Thus, critics most rampantly condemned novels, and fiction in general, for the very characteristics that identified a tough story. Such stories were praised as entertainments to pass the time, and they were founded on the very essence of lying and the difficulty of dividing fact from fiction. Furthermore, they often involved individuals harkening from the lower classes of a slightly immoral bent, similar to the dangers that pundits predicted would result from the overconsumption of stories, leading to vice and ruin. Why, then, would Mount associate himself as a storyteller with such a low genre?

The answer may lie in both the persona he adopted as a dyed-in-the-wool rural Long Islander, and the strategies he used to help sell his paintings. Johns has argued that people bought genre paintings precisely because they provided viewers with a window onto a world that was distant from themselves, but which might also titillate or evoke nostalgia.³¹ Mount attempted to appeal particularly to these audiences, and he frequently emphasized his own ties to rural life. Even though there is some doubt as to his allegiance to the tenets of popular sovereignty and Jacksonian democracy based on his own politics, Mount nevertheless wrote, “I must paint such pictures as speak at once to the spectator, scenes that are most popular, that will be understood on the instant.”³² He at least desired the illusion that his works were popular, and he frequently chose subjects that would further that goal. Additionally, *The Tough Story* provides a cushion between Mount and the responsibility for evoking such subject matter as dialect literature and Yankee theater, since it is the viewer who makes this connection in his own mind, prompted primarily by Mount’s title.

From time to time (and in seeming contrast to his embrace of storytelling), Mount argued for the benefits of the expressive value of visual imagery and its independence from text. He claimed,

Painting of familiar objects has the advantage over writing by addressing itself to those who cannot read or write of any nation whatsoever. It is not necessary for one to be gifted in language to understand a painting if the story is well-told—it speaks all the languages—is understood by the illiterate and enjoyed still more by the learned.³³

His paintings present viewers with opportunities to glean meaning based purely on visual assessment and, in the case of *The Tough Story*, their own experiences of sitting around a fire with companions on a chilly night. However, Mount was also a

wordsmith who, as Johns has so deftly pointed out, knew the ways in which punning text could twist interpretations and add new complications to a viewer's understanding of a work.³⁴

An undated sketchbook provides evidence that Mount was far more ambiguous in his ideas about the relationship between image and text, moving beyond the simple word-twists of punning. In *Reading and Picture Viewing* (Figure 33), Mount presents a small, self-contained scene, perhaps located in yet another country tavern, showcasing two different edifying activities, which one might at first see as opposed. In the foreground, a bespectacled man sits at his ease with elevated feet and crossed legs, focused on a paper or book, while behind him another man gazes with absorption at an outdoor scene with figures hanging upon a wall, perhaps a sketch based on one of Mount's own landscapes. Yet, closer examination yields several linkages between these individuals. Their figures interlock at the knees, so that one man seems almost to grow out of the other, and the line of the reader's book fluidly extends into the viewer's arm. We see only one face, and the bodies and garments of these men mirror each other, from folded arms to cocked hat. Further, the painting, located directly above the head of the reader and the text he holds, might be seen as both a physical representation of an artist's work, to be looked at by a viewer, *and* as a depiction of mental visualization, an attempt to represent the complicated process of storytelling. The reader translates text into projected mental images, while the viewer transforms a visual image into words, in telling the contained story to himself or others, a process visible here in the circular composition that links these activities. Perhaps the visual and the verbal were more closely linked for Mount than his self-marketing statements about the democracy of his work would lead us to believe.

Telling and Re-telling: Four Viewers, Four Stories

This act of imagination, while reliant on a common cultural understanding as to what exactly constitutes a story, is individualized, and viewers approaching a painting showcasing storytelling would doubtless construct their own imagined narratives based on their thoughts and experiences with the genre. Historical evidence provides us with examples of four different stories constructed by four different viewers of *The Tough Story*. First, the patron, Gilmor, wrote a now-lost letter to Mount, identifying two of the listeners in *The Tough Story*: the seated man as a “Citizen” and the cloaked figure as a traveler. Mount then responded, indicating his happiness “to find with but a slight difference your impressions of my intentions are what I intended them.” Whether this is flattery of a valued patron or a confirmation that at least two viewers interpreted the story in a similar fashion, we may never be fully sure. Mount continues, detailing his own interpretation of the situation, which we of course may view as a re-telling of the painting itself:

The man puffing out his smoke is a regular built Long Island tavern and store keeper, who amongst us is often a Gen. or Judge, or Post master, or what you please as regards standing in society, and as you say has quite the air of a Citizen. The man standing wrapt in his cloak is a traveler as you supposed, and is in no way connected with the rest, only waiting the arrival of the Stage—he appears to be listening to what the old man is saying. I designed the picture as a conversation piece. The principle interests to be centered in the old invalid who certainly talks with much zeal. I have placed him in a particular chair which he is always to claim by right of profession, being but seldom out of it from the rising to the going down of the sun. A kind of Bar room oracle, chief umpire during all seasons of warm debate whether religious, moral, or political, and first taster of every new barrel of cider rolled in the cellar, a glass of which he now holds in his hands while he is entertaining his young landlord with the longest story he is ever supposed to tell, having fairly tired out every other frequenter of the establishment.³⁵

Mount describes the storyteller as an old hand at the art, a “professional,” who tells the same long story over and over again, and in doing so the artist diverges from Gilmore’s apparent focus on the listeners in order to locate “the principle interests” in the storyteller. He also leaves the content of the story completely to the viewer’s imagination. Instead, it is the characters and interactions of the figures that merit description, as he carefully delineates their connections or lack thereof. Nevertheless, it is clear that Mount is foregrounding his own work as a narrative. He describes a setting, placing the action firmly on Long Island; the characters are treated individually and given both past and present motivations; the plot unfolds as the characters interact with varying amounts of personal investment in the story being told; and conflict is implied between the long-winded storyteller and his listeners, who tend to become “tired out.” Mount also emphasizes the elements of orality and auralness, from the traveler who listens, to the degree of “zeal” that the speaker imparts in his vocal iterations, and even contemplating the conversation with which viewers, like Mount and Gilmore, might surround the work.

In the next two instances of stories told about the painting, the interest was quite different. In 1841, *The Tough Story* was engraved by Joseph Ives Pease and retitled *The Tough Yarn*, for inclusion in Edward Carey’s annual gift book, *The Gift: A Christmas Annual and New Year’s Present* (Figure 34).³⁶ American gift books followed the convention of similar publications in England. Literally intended to function as gifts, they were usually small, yearly productions that gathered about 300 pages of short stories, poems, and high-quality engravings into a single volume. These tomes were treasured objects. Families might place them on a central table in a parlor, for they had both display value and great sentimental value for the recipient, as

attested by a plethora of inscriptions on the title or presentation pages of the surviving books. The books were designed to be beautiful to the eye with their tooled or embossed leather binding, gilded page edges, colorful endpapers, and meticulous engravings contained therein, usually delicately protected by leaves of tissue paper laid over the image. They rose to such popularity during the late 1820s that Samuel Griswold Goodrich later looked back on the period, calling it “The Age of the Annual.” According to him, every fall, in preparation for the tide of gift-giving that accompanied the holiday season, an “abundant harvest of Diadems, Bijous, Pearls, Gems, Amethysts, Opals, Amaranths, Bouquets, Hyacinths, Amulets, Talismans, Forget-me-nots, Remember-me’s, etc.” flooded the market without fail.³⁷ The gift book quickly took its place as a choice offering among the literary publications of the decade. The first major American annual, *The Atlantic Souvenir*, rose from 2,000 to 10,000 copies sold per year within the first few years. It was simultaneously joined by a number of other annuals that found their way to the market, usually produced in major eastern cities like Boston, New York, and Philadelphia.³⁸

Of these publications, *The Gift*, which was produced annually between 1835 and 1845 by the firm of E. L. Carey and A. Hart in Philadelphia, became recognized as the premier publisher of images based on original paintings. As time progressed, more and more gift books appeared with illustrations engraved after paintings by American artists, such as Thomas Sully, Daniel Huntington, and Mount. These works were accompanied by a range of fiction, and as they were often intended for women and families, those stories tended to be sentimental, a genre that tended to find success among this audience. Carey himself was an important collector and patron of art in Philadelphia, and by the end of its publication run—brought about mainly by Carey’s

early death in 1845—many of the images engraved for *The Gift* either originated from Carey’s own collection, or the publisher commissioned them for engraving.³⁹

The Gift, to which Mount would contribute repeatedly, relied upon a pairing of an image with a text commissioned explicitly to accompany it. And although Mount complained from time to time about the quality of engraving done after his treasured works, Pease’s print after Mount follows the original painting with great fidelity.⁴⁰ The main differences revolve around the disparity caused by differences in medium: the print lacks color and subtle gradations of shadow, although Pease attempts to make up for it by emphasizing the patterns of the hatching and clarity of the lines that delineate the main characters. Also, because of the small size of the final printed image, only about three by five inches, the writing on the notices along the back wall is obscured even further, perhaps explaining the later elision of Mount’s reference to the Long Island railroad.

This format is a particularly interesting illustration for a study considering the combination of visual and literary stories, because, unlike many publications produced throughout the nineteenth century, in the case of Carey’s gift book, artists completed the paintings or engravings *first*, before the text was written, and then the firm commissioned an appropriate, usually popular author to write a story to accompany it. The written texts were as much illustrations of the images as the images could be said to illustrate the words upon the page. Thus, we have in these small books hard evidence of the kinds of stories that might have been told about the genre paintings that graced the rooms of the NAD exhibitions, although the work of an author composing a carefully structured tale on his own is undoubtedly quite different from the kinds of group discussions that might occur in public before the painting.

Of course, these stories represent only one author's interpretation of events, even if they had to be approved by the annual's editors and publishers. Stephanie Heydt argues that this created contexts for the paintings that often changed how they might subsequently be viewed, adding interpretive layers that meant "art in gift books was rarely left to open-ended interpretations."⁴¹ While this may be true to an extent, as evidenced by the variety of stories written about Mount's paintings, the tales published in gift books guided viewers in the kinds of interpretations they might append, rather than limiting them. Most importantly, they created a framework through which audiences came to expect that a single visual image like *The Tough Story* could and did serve as a point from which narrative would flow, both forward and backward in time. Thus, a painting that showed a moment in time could serve as a starting point for the viewer to tell himself (or a listener) a much more elaborate narrative, particularly when the artist used the device of depicting a storytelling session to allow the viewer even more room to play, as he imagined just exactly what kind of story was being told. Similarities between the stories told by various authors depended not only on the publication and popularization of one particular text, but rather on the range of contemporary cultural sources from which the viewer might draw in their imaginings, as examination of the genre of tough stories indicated.

In the case of Mount's *The Tough Story*, when first seeking a text to accompany it in his annual, Carey first approached William Evans Burton, an actor, as well as the founder and editor of *Gentleman's Monthly*, a literary magazine published beginning in 1837.⁴² Burton, seeking further elucidation of Mount's intentions, wrote to the artist. "I fancy that the bill about the Long Island Railroad," he observed, "which is seen affixed to the wall, had some relation to the story-teller's narrative.

The completeness and graphic nature of your design in general forbids the idea of a want of purpose in the group in question.”⁴³ For this author, it was the story’s content that mattered most, and he fixed upon a single detail within the work as inspiration for this narrative. Furthermore, he admitted that the composition of the painting, which centers around a stable, pyramidal grouping and involves the inclusion of many meticulously detailed accouterments, communicated to him the author’s intent to project a narrative. Burton’s story, however, was never completed.

Instead, it fell to the author Seba Smith to write the final version, a narrative that would become so closely intertwined with Mount’s painting that 30 years later it found its way into exhibition catalogues, sometimes without reference to the Smith tale.⁴⁴ By the early 1840s, when Carey asked him to contribute to *The Gift*, Smith was an established author with experience editing and spearheading the production of two newspapers, and he circulated the East Coast’s social world alongside his wife, Elizabeth Smith, who had her own separate career as a writer, lecturer, and proponent of women’s rights. Seba Smith was and still is most well-known, however, as the author of the Jack Downing letters, which he began writing in 1830 because of his frustration about a stalemate between Democratic Republicans supporting Jackson and National Republicans in the Maine legislature. He decided to satirize state politics from the point of view of an ignorant country boy, Jack Downing, whose original mock letter was so vastly popular that Smith embarked upon an enterprise of writing and republishing the letters, following the ignorant but wise rabble-rouser Jack as he became a Major, interacted with other figures in his native abode of Downingville, and went to Washington to observe the political situation there. Smith’s works were so popular that others often faked or pirated them; readers repeatedly equated the author

with or introduced him as Jack Downing; and his setting and characters became intertwined, in viewers' minds, with the paintings of Mount.⁴⁵

Mount was familiar both with the author and his work, as evidenced by a letter he received from his close friend Charles Lanman shortly after the appearance of *The Gift* for 1842. Lanman wrote, "I have just received *The Gift* for 1842, and am glad to see two first rate engravings from your pictures. 'The Tough Story' and 'The Raffle.' The former is illustrated by an article from one of my most intimate friends, Seba Smith Esqr., the original Jack Downing. He is a Whig, *but* a most glorious man. *You* would be delighted with him. I want very much to introduce you, and will, soon as an opportunity presents. His wife, *I* think, is the most gifted female writer in this country."⁴⁶

In the story, "The Tough Yarn," published in *The Gift* during fall 1842, Smith focused on the situation showcased in Mount's painting, creating an elaborate plot to accompany the act of storytelling within the picture.⁴⁷ In his text, Smith provides intricate characterizations of the personalities depicted in the image, although in his case he switches the identities of those involved. The story begins as he introduces Major Grant of Massachusetts, obviously based on the seated, pipe-smoking gentleman from Mount's painting, who, rather than being a local squire-like figure as in Mount's and Gilmore's treatments, is a traveling businessman. Having completed a business deal selling stumps to loggers, Grant stops at a snug tavern and takes a seat upon a stool at a box stove. This "large, portly man, well to do in the world" who "loved his comfort" invites a shared drink with the local tavern denizen, Doctor Snow, "an active member of a temperance society," who discusses business concerns with the Major before rising to leave to visit a patient. The Major protests his exodus,

exclaiming, “Dull business, Doctor, to sit alone one of these long tedious evenings. Always want somebody to talk with; man wasn’t made to be alone, you know.” Thus, Smith sets the tone for the ensuing story, identifying the impulse behind Mount’s painting as revolving around man’s need for social interaction and conversation, especially “talk,” both to pass the time and to allow the experience of new ideas and situations.

The doctor’s exit is delayed when yet another character stumps into the room and takes a seat. This is Jack Robinson, a local whom the author characterizes as “a small, brisk man, with a grey twinkling eye, and a knowing expression of countenance” who “looked round with a satisfied air, that seemed to say, ‘Now, gentlemen if you want to know the time of day, here’s the boy that can tell ye.’” Not only is Smith’s entire narrative rich with dialogue that he imagines passing among the painted characters; he ascribes speech to the very look of the individual, personifying him and allowing his “satisfied air” to speak to the viewer, and therefore translating a silent, visual representation into an oral presence. This echoes and encapsulates the very process of Smith’s writing endeavor, and also provides evidence of a contemporary reaction in which visual images evoke not only narrative, but also imagined sound in the form of speech.

The Major greets Robinson’s arrival with the eager observation, “Well, that’s good news...if he’ll only talk. Will he talk, doctor?” With this query, Smith arrives at the plot he has imagined for Mount’s painting. The doctor announces that Robinson is “the greatest talker you ever met” and evokes a bet to cover the night’s reckoning: Snow holds that Robinson could not answer the simplest question in less than half an hour. Significantly, this is the same amount of time that the Doctor had previously

spent in conversation with the Major, as he “answered many of his inquiries about the townships in that section of the State, described minutely the process of lumbering, explained how it might be made profitable, and showed why it was so often attended with great loss” as “a half hour thus passed imperceptibly away.” This discussion, which one presumes navigates through the predominant concerns that occupy a business traveler like the Major, is accorded this mere sentence of description, despite its long duration. In contrast, the same span of time, when filled by Jack Robinson’s meanderings, fills pages of text. Smith has decided what is important to his readers, leaving out talk of economics and politics in favor of what follows.

Major Grant carefully considers his opening gambit, then asks whether Robinson’s lameness “is in the leg or in the foot.” Yet again, the viewing process is here translated into words. Like Burton, Smith fixes upon a single detail within the painting, but this time it is not the railroad notice, but rather the crutch and bandage wrapped around the storyteller’s left knee. The fictional character asks the fictional storyteller the same questions the painting’s viewer might ask while attempting to construct a reasoned story to fit the image: what has happened to this man, why has he been painted this way, and what is the story behind it? Smith has obviously paid close attention to the image despite his decision that the included story revolved not around the Long Island railroad poster but around the injury incurred. Throughout the text, he returns to details that tie his story together with the image, evidence of close looking and the desire to spin out narrative implications based upon it. Smith tucks in references to the Major’s long pipe, the box stove at which he sits, the doctor’s wrapper and cap, Jack Robinson’s crutch and positioning of his lame leg upon the edge of the stove-hearth, his hat thrown casually upon the floor, and the doctor’s

stance with his back turned toward Mr. Robinson, presumably to disguise the laughter that wells up at the joke he has played upon Major Grant. Additionally, his identification of Dr. Snow as a member of a temperance society indicates that upon looking at the image, Smith immediately considered the implications of the drink, which he identifies as the eminently local New England beverage, hot flip, and its connections to the social politics of his own world.⁴⁸

When mentally constructing his query, the Major projected one path for the conversation, thinking to himself, “if it were in the leg, Mr. Robinson would say it was in his leg; and if it were in his foot, he would at once reply, in his foot; and if it were in both, what could be more natural than that he should say, in both? and that would seem to be the end of the story.” Had Jack Robinson kept to this script, the bet would be over, as he would tell no story at all. Yet, clearly, such a reply would both stunt the written text and contradict the details of the painting to which Smith otherwise so carefully attends. In Mount’s *Tough Story*, a significant span of time has passed during the interaction, as evidenced by the accumulation of wood chips scattered about the participants’ feet and the reduced level of flip in their glasses. Eventually the Major loses the bet, as Robinson hies off on narrative tangents involving steamboats, swimming accidents, turkey shoots, and bear attacks, without ever fully answering the question, despite the Major’s repeated promptings to push him to return to the point. The joke is of course on the Major; he wanted talk, and he has been inundated with a veritable outpouring of discourse that certainly passes the time, both for the storied traveler and for the reader of the gift book.

Periodically throughout the course of his tale telling, Robinson inserts nuggets of advice identifying both his own narrative strategies and, more generally, the process

exploited by Seba Smith and his fellow Yankee humorists. Just before launching into his first account of a steamboat voyage with his father from New York to Providence, Jack reminisces about what his “old father” once told him in his youth. “Says he, ‘Jack, you blockhead, don’t you never tell where anything is, unless you can first tell how it come there.’” This piece of dialect-rich, homespun advice nevertheless sets out a literary rule for the proper delineation of plot, which Robinson proceeds to stretch to absurdity, a device upon which Smith relies to get the humor of the situation across. In order for the never-ending, meandering story to strike the reader as funny, he must first understand how it breaks conventional rules of storytelling, and does so quite consciously. “Bad” writing here becomes a subtle device used to underscore the art of the storyteller and the complicated twists and turns the reader/listener must undertake in order to make logical sense of its progression. The humor also arises from Robinson’s misapplication of his father’s advice, here brought into the realm of narration, when in the circumstances from which it arose, it had a quite different meaning altogether. While aboard the steamboat, a fellow passenger found his pocketbook missing, and upon searching the ship Jack found it at the head of his father’s berth and returned it to the gentleman, who proceeded to harpoon his father for the theft. His father’s advice certainly involved the handling of speech, but the author cleverly manipulates the original meaning from “telling stories,” a kind of tattling that borders on a lie, to “storytelling,” which in practice tends to involve the lies inherent in fiction and exaggeration.

Smith presents a philosophy on storytelling, told *through* a story. He goes on to dwell upon the importance of determining “the principal cause” of his injury, once again turning to a traditional narrational strategy for advancing a plot, delineating

cause and effect. Later, upon being prompted by Major Grant yet again, Robinson allows, “Well, after I tell you the particulars...you can judge for yourself.” Here he sets forth another rule concerning his brand of storytelling; he will provide a plethora of details, allowing his audience to “judge for yourself.” The reader/listener undertakes an active role, not only in sussing out the answer to the Major’s question, but in determining the value or truthfulness of Robinson’s stories. When Robinson describes the course of a bear attack, during which he climbed a tree, chased constantly by the bear that “began to naw my heels” along the way, then fell thirty feet, landing with the bear atop him, the reader must decide whether to believe the story. However, since it’s a “tough yarn,” as described in the title, the educated reader assumes it is a lie.

Perhaps this too might provide an alternate way of looking at some of the interpretive comments advanced about Mount’s artworks by critics. Again and again, critics praised Mount for his naturalistic approach to painting, alongside the “truth” or “real” nature of the scenes that he depicted. When Luman Reed wrote in praise of Mount’s work, he exclaimed, “your truth of expression and natural attitudes are to me perfectly delightful,” praise that Mount would likely have welcomed in view of the considerable effort he put into his painting techniques.⁴⁹ When he exhibited his painting *Boys Trapping* at the fourteenth annual exhibition of the NAD in 1839, the critic for the *New York Spectator* listed it among the key works “that most attracted notice,” giving only the title and the phrase, “The perfection of truth and nature.”⁵⁰ Furthermore, when Edgar Allan Poe reviewed the appearance of the engraving after *The Tough Story* in *The Gift*, he noted, “Mr. Mount’s merits are those of acute observation and fidelity. These merits, although not of the highest order, have the

advantage of being universally appreciable.”⁵¹ Again and again, critics praised Mount for his truthful depictions of events and natural appearances, criticism of which the artist was likely aware, as he quoted tidbits of it in his diaries and autobiographical sketches. Obviously he considered naturalistic detail and fine brushwork an essential aspect of storytelling. Yet Mount resists giving his viewers what Roland Barthes would term “a kind of narrative *luxury*, lavish to the point of offering many ‘futile’ details and thereby increasing the cost of narrative information.”⁵² Although the artist includes a number of items within the room, none of them seem extraneous, as evidenced by Burton’s or Smith’s inclusion of them in their narratives. Nevertheless, the fact remains that for many of Mount’s reviewers, the combination of realism with careful attention to detail did produce a kind of Barthesian reality effect, brought about by the seemingly matter-of-fact, naturalistic reporting of people and objects within a specific place.

At the same time, however, by identifying his tale as a “tough” story, Mount forces viewers familiar with the genre to question the reality of what they are seeing. Is the orator merely telling a “tough story,” or is the painting a tough story in and of itself? Is Mount slyly referencing the lie, or fiction, that stands at the very heart of his painting? Or is he allowing it to function without irony? Tough stories self-consciously address how stories work and the learned codes that make them possible, thus functioning as metastories. Similarly, Mount’s painting can be seen as a picture about paintings, at least those that tell stories, a kind of meta-painting. It represents a story while also drawing attention to how the artist worked to construct that story.

If the painting follows the logic of tough stories and their effect on audiences at the time, one could read it as a claim that the veracity of the chosen situation

matters little in comparison to how the story is told. The bigger the fiction—and the more readily viewers are convinced by it—the more talented the storyteller is. Throughout his prolific personal journals Mount always seemed exceedingly preoccupied with the *how* of his paintings: he devotes a great deal of time to describing intricate techniques for mixing colors and applying paint to the canvas for his own future reference. For instance, one such indicative passage runs,

Shadows in a portrait should not be too sharpe but soft and melting away in the receding shadows. Have roundness with breadth. Lines should be sharp in particular places—only—.... This sharpness and softness is important and should always be in the mind of the artist—parts of the figure should be broken with the background to produce fullness and magic of effect. It is well to turn your portraits upside down to see the gradations. White and a very little red can be scumbled over your work in the finishing with a good effect. Colours should be rubbed in with your fingers. Titian prefered his fingers to brushes in finishing. Suffer but little white to enter your picture, and only in the demi-tints.⁵³

The Tough Story benefited from the author's close attention to such detail. The close painting creates a reality effect, and Mount's attention to the sharp lines of the figures and their belongings, as well as his use of melting, soft shadows throughout the background, draws attention towards the central actions where the story takes place. It also provides evidence that, although the critics, and Mount himself, asserted his close ties to nature, the artist was nonetheless very aware of the highly constructed nature of his paintings.⁵⁴ He paid close attention to the distribution of colors, lines, and shadows in the effort to achieve a particular effect, and he indicates his desire to become bodily involved with this process, by actively rotating the canvas or panel, working with it, and smearing the colors across its surface using the pads of his fingers, which scholars and critics rarely mention because of the high degree of finish he ultimately achieved.⁵⁵ Although it is impossible to determine Mount's motivations,

it is nevertheless intriguing to consider that *The Tough Story* might be an acknowledgment of the artist's own mythmaking about his provincial, natural, rural roots and the effortlessly "true" paintings that seem to arise from his circumstances naturally.

The regional nature of the talk to which we are witness is also particularly important, as Smith has latched onto the image and situated it within a particular genre of tale that dominated throughout the middle of the nineteenth century, and beyond. Even though he supposedly lives in a "back town" of Maine, Jack Robinson's stories are firmly rooted in the subject matter of *southwestern* storytellers from the antebellum "southwest," which we would now identify largely as Tennessee, Missouri, and the surrounding states. Perhaps the most readily apparent way Smith positions himself as an author is through his use of dialect throughout the story, although it only issues from the lips of the long-winded storyteller himself, Jack Robinson, leaving the viewer the opportunity to identify with either of the more sophisticated listeners. Compared to how writers treat words in some of the later examples of dialect literature set specifically in the southwest, Smith exercises great restraint in his use of embellished phrases, colloquialisms, and misspellings. In each case, he includes just enough such flair to indicate to the reader that Jack Robinson is positioned as an outsider, with concomitant connections to the common man, the natural order (here figured as raccoons and bears), and the land itself to render him an interesting and useful model. He turns to figurative language while telling his tale, claiming that his father threatened to send a man "where a streak of lightning wouldn't reach you in six months" and then looked "gritty enough to bite a board-nail off." Smith relies on scattered grammatical distortions to signal Robinson's character, as he

drops letters, misuses adjectives, and muffs his subject-verb agreement, as when he's hunting and, "Then out come an awful great black bear, the ugliest looking feller that I ever laid my eyes on.... I begun to feel pretty streaked...and I'd a gin all the world if I'd only had my gun in my hand." His vocabulary, while still somewhat sophisticated, also skews towards the quaint, regional terminology in favor in popular periodicals like *Spirit of the Times*. Thus, he claims that things were "gone goose" with him, or announces that he would complete an action "bime-by." Not only might viewers of *The Tough Story* imagine the passage of speech, it would likely have been a particular speech, real or imagined.

In the mid-nineteenth century, this kind of vocabulary developed such a prevalent presence on the literary scene that it became a national concern to Americans like Noah Webster, who was convinced that Americans should have their own language, separate from Britain, and to travelers from abroad.⁵⁶ In her 1832 *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, Frances Trollope wrote, "I very seldom, during my whole stay in the country, heard a sentence elegantly turned and correctly pronounced from the lips of an American. There is something either in the expression or the accent that jars the feelings and shocks the taste."⁵⁷ American logophile John Russell Bartlett became so entranced with books using "the vulgar language of the United States" that he began to collect unusual words and phrases from all regions of the nation, which he published in his *Dictionary of Americanisms: A Glossary of Words and Phrases, Usually Regarded as Peculiar to the United States* in 1848. In his foreword, Bartlett argued that Americans "should [embrace] all those words usually called provincial or vulgar—all the words, whatever be their origin, which are used in familiar conversation, and but seldom employed in composition—all the

perversions of language, and abuses of words into which people, in certain sections of the country, have fallen, and some of those remarkable and ludicrous forms of speech which have been adopted in the Western States.” He even posited a genealogy for the introduction of colloquialisms, as they moved from their uneducated inventors, to their provincial children, were picked up by stump-speakers and members of Congress, and finally found their way into newspapers where they became “familiar to all.”⁵⁸ Smith littered his story with invented words highlighted as Americanisms by Bartlett, who defines “gone goose,” for instance: “‘It’s a *gone goose* with him,’ means that he is past recovery. The phrase is a vulgarism in New England. In New York it is said ‘He’s a *gone gander*,’ i.e. a lost man; and in the West ‘He’s a *gone coon*.’”⁵⁹ This kind of American talk would have been an integral part of the viewers’ imaginings of the voice of Mount’s teller of tough stories, as the regional accent of the teller was one of the most emphasized aspects of such a figure.

James Caron has argued that the tall tale raconteur is an expression of the comic side of America’s national character, one who engages in the speech tactic of “tall talk” in order to distinguish Americans from Europeans, creating an American sense of self through new-world speech. He is both a wise man and a fool, both scorned as a country bumpkin and admired for his freedom, shrewdness, and sense of adventure.⁶⁰ This same character showed up continually in Yankee theater, which rose to inescapable prominence in and around New York in the 1820s and 1830s, with such blockbusters as Woodworth’s *The Forest Rose; or, American Farmers* taking the scene by storm, filled with characters based on the stereotypical Yankee or Jonathan, who audiences often regarded with nationalistic pride as quintessentially American. This Yankee was a rustic: a Down East political philosopher who was uncouth but

nevertheless saw to the heart of politics. Like Jack Downing, he was a keen bargainer, trickster, and a teller of long, pointless tales who, in the presence of his sweetheart, became tongue-tied and naive.⁶¹

Despite its use of colloquialisms, Smith's "The Tough Yarn" remains a fairly highbrow form of such dialect-rich, tall tale literature, and thus earns its place within the largely sentimental world of the gift book. In contrast, authors wrote later works in a thick dialect, such as George W. Harris's *Sut Lovingood. Yarns Spun by a 'Nat'ral Born Durn'd Fool. Warped and Wove for Public Wear* (1867). It takes a substantial amount of time to read this text, as one must sound it out in one's head or read it aloud, a device that locates the "author" in time, place, class, etc., but also invokes an oral tradition and forces the reader to participate in it. For example, the main character, Sut, "wishes I cud read an' write, jis' a littil; but then hits bes' es hit am, fur ove all the fools the worild hes tu contend wif, the edicated wuns am the worst; they breeds ni ontu all the devilment a-gwine on. But I wer a-thinkin, ef I cud write myself, hit wud then *raley* been my book."⁶²

The book's illustrations, produced by an unmentioned artist, similarly rely on extreme hyperbole to entice and entertain viewers. In a much more exaggerated tough story than that provided by Smith, "Sut's New-Fangled Shirt," the raconteur tells the story of his landlady's attempts to "citify" him by starching his shirt after she saw something similar on a lawyer, and the resultant escapade that occurs after he sweats while working, falls asleep upstairs, wakes up with the shirt pasted to his skin, and has to remove it painfully, by nailing the front and back to a hole in the loft floor and jumping through, so the shirt peeled off, taking hair and skin with it. The text is obviously written for an audience of city dwellers, accustomed to wearing starched

shirts, who would find this anecdote amusing in contrast to their own experience, or perhaps with sympathy from those who disliked uncomfortable starched collars; it joins a variety of literature designed to make fun of outsiders' attempts to imitate city fashions, by doing it improperly.⁶³ Everything about the accompanying illustration is exaggerated (Figure 35). The artist made Sut's spraddled, nude body into a ridiculous object, headless and mostly armless, obscured by the white folds of his shirt, and composed of an angular compilation of lines, no two exactly parallel, all going in different directions and thus emphasizing his knobby knees, jutting hipbones, and ribcage. The image is caught mid-action, as Sut falls and the shirt skins off his back; instead of a rush of activity or contemplative pause for the viewer to fill in as he likes, the character is forever suspended in a pose of ridiculous agony, with widespread fingers and drawn-up feet. The illustrator provides a very *memorable* image, strikingly composed and paired carefully with the story, condensing it into a single moment that implies all that came before it: the reason the shirt must be removed in this fashion and Sut's skinless nudity. Here the shirt is literally turned into "a picter tu look at" for the viewer. This is a case of fairly straightforward illustration (if visually complicated and stimulating), much more common to the genre of tough stories that developed in the years following Mount's treatment of the subject. Here, the viewer is left in no doubt as to the narrative that he should attach to the image, which ties to a particular moment within the text it illustrates.

The relationship between Mount's painting and Smith's story, on the other hand, is dramatically different. Even though the author obviously spent a great deal of time looking at the painting or possibly the engraving that made its way into *The Gift*, the connection between the two is still a great deal more open-ended. By focusing on

a moment of conversation, a story that is being told—without specifically illustrating that story—Mount leaves much of the work of the image in his audience’s hands. The story, whether humorous or polemical, moralizing or raunchy, is ceded to the viewer, with only subtle clues left by the artist as to which direction one might take. By picturing a story being told, the artist cleverly includes both all and no stories; activity is taking place, yet all motion and adventure reside in the viewer’s imagination, supported by Mount’s suggestive but stable composition and blank-faced characters.

From Image to Story to Image, Oh My!

The Tough Story makes for an interesting case study for yet another reason. Aside from the several documented tales told about it at the time, its subsequent publishing history provides a chance to further examine the relationship between image and story in antebellum culture. As discussed, Mount painted his cabinet-size picture in answer to a commission by his patron Gilmor; he then sent the work for display in the owner’s Baltimore home, although it was occasionally exhibited in public venues.⁶⁴ Four years later, Carey borrowed the painting so it could be engraved and published it in the pages of *The Gift* issued for the year 1842, where it appeared alongside the story by Smith.⁶⁵

Because of Smith’s widespread renown, his story “The Tough Yarn” saw publication in several venues aside from *The Gift* over the years. A collection of Smith’s stories arrived in book form in market stalls and bookshops across the United States in 1854. *Way Down East; or, Portraits of Yankee Life* was a rousing success; as one reviewer noted, it “is worth a cartload of trashy novels, and must be a great favorite with all classes of readers. Its portraits of Yankee life are by general consent allowed to be the best ever written.”⁶⁶ In January 1855, it appeared again in

the pages of *The United States Magazine of Science, Art, Manufactures, Agriculture, Commerce and Trade* and it was revived once more three years later, in February 1858, for *Emerson's Magazine and Putnam's Monthly*.⁶⁷ In each case, the story was accompanied by an engraved illustration, captioned once as “Jack Robinson Going into the Tough Yarn” (Figure 36). However, rather than a reprint of Pease’s engraving after Mount, the 1854 publication included another illustration altogether, by an unknown artist. The reason for this new image is unknown. Perhaps the publisher could not obtain the plate from Carey’s firm or permission from the owner to re-engage the original painting; maybe the new publications’ print and reproduction technology differed from that used for Pease’s engraving; or possibly the publisher or author desired a new engraving completed in a different style to serve as frontispiece for the anthology of Smith’s collected works or that might be more easily printed in popular magazines. Regardless, the engraving provides a unique opportunity to consider the result of this kind of translation: from the realm of the visual to the written word, and then from text back to an entirely different image.

At first glance, elements of the illustration seem consistent with both the story and the original painting. Three male figures cluster around a box stove in a small indoor space, surrounded by drink, the crutch that signals Jack Robinson’s lameness, and a discarded hat upon the floor, and the standing doctor’s vision is still obscured by the hat tipped low over his downturned face. However, in all other particulars—the composition, the moment portrayed, and its relationship to storytelling and the audience—the image has changed drastically. Rather than his earlier incarnation as an eagerly leaning forward, gesticulating storyteller, here Robinson leans back at his ease, crosses his legs, and sips from a glass. His face is turned away from the viewer

and covered by locks of hair and shadow, and there is no longer such a resonating, active space left between the storyteller and his auditors. The stove pipe serves merely as a frame for the action, rather than as a signifier for the unseen division between speaker and listener. Here the emphasis has completely shifted from the storytelling moment to the representation of three men, all subtly disengaged from each other, as they sit in a room cluttered with a plethora of items that no longer seem to relate to a single story at all. Here we have objects shoved cheek by jowl into a room—a wall calendar, a clock, books, a cigar box, decanters—for the express purpose of exclaiming “we are here, and so are you,” the reality effect in practice. This illustration provides a setting for unpictured action, without ever attempting to work independently of the text for which it was produced. Unlike Mount’s image, here there is less room for imaginative reconstruction of conversation and character. Even the caption that accompanies the image in the book has reversed the roles: “‘Mr. Robinson,’ said the Major, ‘if I may presume to make the inquiry, is your lameness in the leg or in the foot?’” Now it is Major Grant who is given the dominant role, as Robinson slurps at his drink, the bandages that prompted the question mysteriously vanished. This illustration allows the text to speak for it, as “the greatest talker you ever met” is rendered mute, mouthless.

Sound and Story

For Mount’s audience, *The Tough Story* would recognizably refer to a particular type of story, one rooted strongly in an oral tradition, and experienced aurally by its audience. It therefore is important nevertheless to consider how artists represent sound and its meaning.⁶⁸ Sometimes the clamor is obvious, as in Lilly Martin Spencer’s *War Spirit at Home* (Figure 37), in which children cry, bang

buckets, and toot on horns, a swirl of noise and motion that surrounds the mother's island of absorption. Mount too studied the ways in which one might represent sound in the visual medium. His lifelong interest in music led him to produce a number of works featuring musicians or dancing, including one of his most famous paintings, *The Power of Music* (Figure 38), which highlights the attitudes of three listeners and their responses to the aural and mental stimulation of music.⁶⁹ Here a boy plays the violin, drawing out a long note with the stroke of his bow, one that would reverberate through the cavernous space of the wooden barn, rather like the sounding box of a violin in its acoustic properties. Throughout his life, Mount was continually fascinated by the aural properties of music, and particularly of the violin. His brother, Robert Nelson Mount, was a dance instructor and musician, and the artist himself played the fiddle for dances and concerts on Long Island, collected fiddle tunes that he devoutly sent along with letters to his brother, and even invented a new (although commercially unsuccessful) type of violin, patented in 1852 and exhibited at New York's Crystal Palace exhibition.⁷⁰

In *The Power of Music*, Mount gives free reign to that interest, creating a work that is remarkably parallel with *The Tough Story*, although here it is the art of music that takes center stage, as its creator sits on a stool and entertains several listeners, who adopt mannerisms similar to those displayed in the earlier painting about storytelling. Again, he highlights the act of eavesdropping, emphasizing the importance and qualities of listening simply by removing the source of the sound from view. Sound creates the bridge between the spaces and figures in this painting, and listening is the subject matter. However, in this work Mount has moved beyond *The Tough Story* in his concentration on the process of listening in particular and the ways in which sound

can permeate space and turn corners. He has created two distinct spaces in this work. One echoes the dialogic interplay occurring in *The Tough Story*, where a musician plays, while two (white) men both listen and look on. They face inward towards the source of sound, the violinist's bow that is the focus of attention and the center of the stagelike space framed by the barn door. Once again Mount presents a trio interacting, although here it is music rather than story that binds the three together (although it is possible vocalization is occurring as well, since Mount and his brother both concerned themselves with collecting music for the violin and the lyrics that would accompany popular songs for it). The second space, that outside the door, houses an African American figure dramatically excluded from the interior scene of interaction. He is carefully positioned outside the visual range of the other inhabitants of the painting, yet he listens in, eavesdropping as he leans forward to indicate his intense auditory interest. Here sound is represented as more omnipresent than the dialogue that occurs between closely packed figures in *The Tough Story*. The power of music is, in part, that it permeates walls and social barriers, pushing beyond the line of vision and even beyond the visual field itself. One might imagine *The Power of Music* as a series of frames, all with access to the music that moves freely among them: the small square of the barn interior, the larger rectangle of the painted canvas, and the expanded field of the viewer's space in the room in which the painting is viewed.⁷¹

Mount's *Tough Story* is less grandiose in its aural gestures, yet there are special sonic associations that accompany speech, as opposed to sound or music. The viewer engages in speech, just in the act of describing a painting. This parallel draws the viewer closer to the subjects of the painting, allowing him to pose as the speaker (telling the story) or the listener (hearing/imagining the story being told by the artist).

Speech surrounds us as a basic part of human interaction. Even before the development of recording technology, inventors worked to develop new ways to capture the intonation, dialect, and content of speech rapidly. In 1837, Isaac Pitman invented the shorthand system of phonography, a system of writing based directly on the sound of human speech, which was designed to help vocalize writing.⁷² This system, its popularity in the press, and the fury of alternatives that flooded the market in the next decades, demonstrated what Ivan Kreilkamp has called the Victorian phonographic period, during which people were “obsessed with print’s relationship to voice and with the effects of transcribing or writing voice.”⁷³

Mount explored the representation of the dynamics of speech and listening not only in his paintings, but also in his sketchbooks, where gestures are exaggerated to clearly convey this process. In *Discussing the News* (Figure 39), one figure seems to cup his ear to facilitate better hearing, while simultaneously tilting his body at a slight angle towards the man possessing the newspaper. In another undated sketch, *Reading the News* (Figure 40), the leftmost gentleman argues by counting his points on his hands, which are the center of attention through the dark lines that delineate them and the focalizing gazes of those involved. Significantly, yet again a painting appears above the head of the reader, as if it sprouted directly from his thoughts, mirroring the pages of the paper held directly below it. For Mount, words could serve as inspiration for paintings, as evidenced by his scattered attempts to paint scenes from Shakespeare (although this was part of a deeper interest among painters of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century in the United States and Britain) or his desire to draw upon the tough story tradition.⁷⁴ Conversely, paintings could obviously serve as invitations to tell stories about them, as in the many gift books in which his works appeared.

The gestures in Mount's *The Tough Story* are subtler, with only the line of the speaker's forearm and the tenseness of his hunched shoulder indicating his intensity. Nevertheless, the composition places the figures in a tightly packed circle around the stove, leading the eye among the figures and emphasizing interaction. There is little movement, yet there is still *action*. The tension between the figures in Mount's painting becomes more apparent when contrasted with a similar work by Richard Caton Woodville. Gilmor was also a patron of Woodville, who had a chance to see Mount's work in Gilmor's collection before he painted *Two Figures at a Stove*, also called *Tough Story*, in 1845 (Figure 41).⁷⁵ Although the subject matter and setting are similar, the atmosphere depicted in Woodville's work is markedly different. The centrally placed man extends his large, clumsy hands in a gesture to warm them; there is no sense that he is emphasizing a point in a story. The pyramidal composition of his body is more stable; rather than reaching towards an auditor with both hands and legs, he is upright, and his eyes stare vacantly into the distance, rather than meeting the gaze of a listener. Woodville's painting bears several of the hallmarks described by Leo Mazow as "silencing strategies": "the unanimated body represents sound hushed," and the subdued lighting invokes quietude.⁷⁶ Rather than a close-knit circle of companions, where even the man turned away hangs on the words of the storyteller, Woodville presents us with two men who are physically close, and yet isolated. The timing here is more ambiguous; perhaps the story has already been told, and the two men contemplate its implications.

By contrast, for Mount, storytelling was of prime importance in his work. He sought to create works in which "the story is well-told," and he once wrote his close friend Charles Lanman, asserting, "I wished to preserve breadth and to tell my

story.”⁷⁷ Mount even conceived of creating longer series of images on at least two occasions. He penned a scenario for a 33 painting sequence in his diary among a list of possible subjects, entitling it “A Short History of the Village School Master Mr. Dignity.” In a melodramatic story that likely owes its inception to sentimental fiction, Mr. Dignity courts his love while agonizing over the encroachments of his two rivals, a piano teacher and a whale man, before finally winning the day and celebrating his marriage. There is no evidence that any of the images were realized, in paint or sketch, most likely because of the impracticality of creating such an immense series of genre paintings in nineteenth-century America.⁷⁸ His much-admired role model, William Hogarth, could manage it. Mount could not. Still, he continued to dream, and in 1849 sketched a series of six vignettes detailing the adventures of Headstrong, a naïve, stoop-shouldered young man who, upon seeing a poster advertising the glories of California gold, determines, against all advice, to chance his luck (Figures 42 – 47). This morality tale of youthful folly—Headstrong is eventually killed by an Indian who steals his gold—was never realized, instead giving way to the single scene, *California News* (Figure 48). Here, Mount reverts to form, presenting the viewer with a panoply of posters and images, allowing him to create his own tale of folly—or glory—as he sees fit. And significantly, it is these depictions of images, among other things, that serve as catalysts to press the story onward. Although many of Mount’s works, like *The Tough Story*, draw heavily upon literary traditions, which present the knowledgeable viewer with a narrative template, he often leaves interpretation open, allowing sophisticated viewers to draw their own conclusions. Like Headstrong as he sits on a riverbank with eyes closed, we can use a visual image to dream, as imagination transports us into our own stories.

The term “transport” provides a useful model of how one might view storytelling paintings like *The Tough Story*.⁷⁹ It is significant that authors set many paintings or stories depicting storytelling among modes of transportation—in railroad stations, travelers’ taverns, or on steamboats. These new modes of travel presented users with: 1) time to fill; 2) an occasion to encounter new people and situations, prime fodder for interesting stories; and 3) an opportunity to “transport” themselves beyond their everyday lives into a world of the imagination. In his book, *The Look of Reading*, Garrett Stewart has argued that painted scenes of reading allow the viewer access to the “persistent mystery of transport”:

From the look of it, the moment captured in the painted scene of reading has already carried the mind away. Only paradox could do justice to the simultaneous focus and dispersion of the scene. Reading is where you go to be elsewhere. In taking in a page, readers are themselves taken in by it—and out of themselves.... painted reading can, in its most ambitious instances, recruit narrative energy even while removing it from view.⁸⁰

Painted storytelling works in a similar fashion, although it represents a considerably more social endeavor, if often idealized. William Sidney Mount’s *The Tough Story* invites us to join the cozy scene before us, figuratively scooting up to the fire that is so emblematic of the storyteller’s art. We construct a story about these three gathered individuals...who are they? Where are they from? Yet, at the same time, the painting serves as another frame tale, encouraging viewers to move beyond the object itself, into their own memories and imaginations, calling on the audience to invent tough stories or recall ones heard before. Narrative was key. In a real sense, for viewers in the 1830s and 1840s, looking at paintings meant seeing, telling, and hearing stories.

ENDNOTES

¹ Gilmor described himself as a connoisseur in his journal while studying in Amsterdam in 1800. Quoted in Brooks, *Great Dutch Paintings from America*, 24. While traveling in Europe and throughout the rest of his life, Gilmor collected hundreds of paintings from American and English dealers, as well as private parties like the Dutch consul in Baltimore and Cornelis Apostool, the Director of the Koninklijk Museum in Amsterdam. Although few can now be traced, inventories of his collection recorded approximately 150 Dutch and Flemish paintings. It is well established that many American collectors of genre painting were also interested in earlier Dutch genre works. This perhaps served as motivation to seek out similar contemporary works by American artists, which would have been both cheaper and a sign of the patron's interest in supporting a national art. However, for the purposes of this dissertation I am more concerned with patrons' and audience members' interests in storytelling in general, and therefore will only briefly touch on this issue of influence. For more details about collectors of Dutch art in America, see the aforementioned Brooks, *Great Dutch Paintings from America*, as well as Walter A. Liedtke, "The Study of Dutch Art in America," *Artibus et Historiae* 21 (2000): 207-220; Nancy Minty, "Dutch and Flemish Seventeenth-Century Art in America, 1800-1940: Collections, Connoisseurship, and Perceptions," (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 2003); and Clark, "The Impact of Seventeenth-Century Dutch and Flemish Genre Painting." For more on Gilmor in particular, see Lance Lee Humphries, "Robert Gilmor, Jr. (1774-1848): Baltimore Collector and American Art Patron," (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1998).

² Letter from William Sidney Mount to Robert Gilmor, August 20, 1836. Quoted in Frankenstein, *William Sidney Mount*, 75.

³ Gilmor visited Luman Reed's picture gallery around 1835, and there he saw two recent works, both completed that year, by Mount: *Bargaining for a Horse* and *Undutiful Boys*. Wolff, *Richard Caton Woodville*, 112. For a thorough treatment of Luman Reed's collection, see Ella M. Foshay, *Mr. Luman Reed's Picture Gallery: A Pioneer Collection of American Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1990).

⁴ Letter from Luman Reed to William Sidney Mount, July 25, 1835. Quoted in full in Frankenstein, *William Sidney Mount*, 69.

⁵ Ibid., 8.

⁶ Mount admitted to seeing and admiring works by Hogarth. In an undated autobiographical sketch, he describes a visit to the collection of his brother Henry's business partner, William Inslee. While there, he saw "a fine collection of pencil drawings executed by himself—also a set of large engravings by Hogarth which he took pleasure in showing me," a circumstance that Mount recalled and was careful to note years later. Frankenstein, *William Sidney Mount*, 16. A great deal of scholarship exists examining William Hogarth's works as narrative, satire, and cultural productions of their time. Hogarth's productions can be usefully considered alongside Mount, both to highlight the differences between the audiences and cultures for which they were producing, and to think about how the narrative impulses present within their diverse oeuvres produce similar narrative and storytelling effects for viewers. A few useful sources on Hogarth include: Robin Simon, *Hogarth, France, and British Art: The Rise of the Arts in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London: Hogarth Arts Ltd., 2007); Jeremy Barlow, *'The Enraged Musician': Hogarth's Musical Imagery* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, 2005); Matthew Craske, *William Hogarth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); and Robert L. S. Cowley, *Marriage A-la-Mode: A Review of Hogarth's Narrative Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983).

⁷ "The Fine Arts. National Academy of Design," *The New-York Mirror; a Weekly Gazette of Literature and the Fine Arts*, July 7, 1838, 16, 2. Although other reviewers continually linked Mount's production, understandably, to his predecessor in the art of genre painting, David Willkie, here the critic adamantly opposed such a link. "And there is no greater mistake, we might almost say insult, than to call him the American Wilkie; for he is as unlike Wilkie as Wilkie is unlike Michael Angelo, or Titian. Wilkie arrives to produce an impression by a bold effect of light and shade: Mount scarce gives enough of either to detach the figures from the background. Wilkie arranges his composition in strict adherence to the rules of the art: in Mount we rarely see the angular, or circular form, visible at all. Wilkie, like Ostarde, fills up his backgrounds and arranges his accessories with a minuteness and care sometimes bordering on affectation: Mount gives not even the handle of a cup, unless it is to carry on and finish his story. Wilkie disposes of his colours, and balances them, both hot and cold, with all the breadth and harmony of the Venetian school: Mount bows submission to no school, and gives nature her every-day garb, without the least exaggeration or ornament. And yet, for all this, who thinks the less of Mount's works? The truth is, he is a child of nature—a vigorous, untaught and untutored plant, who borrows from no one, imitates no one, and should be compared to no one." Therefore, this critic, who possessed significant knowledge of the genealogy of art, admired Mount precisely because he did "bend" the rules in order to emphasize

storytelling so effectively, without ceding his independence or natural talent, two qualities valued to the extreme in republican America.

⁸ Letter from William Sidney Mount to Robert Gilmore, December 5, 1837. Quoted in full in Frankenstein, *William Sidney Mount*, 75-76.

⁹ On the tradition of the conversation piece, see Mario Praz, *Conversation Pieces: A Survey of the Informal Group Portrait in Europe and America* (London: Methuen & Co., 1971). Deborah Johnson also interpreted the use of this phrase by the artist as a signal for the participation of the viewer: “The further implication that this conversation might engage the viewer as well suggests Mount’s interest in the form and reveals that he specifically intended his paintings to be a stimulus to debate. Clearly, in his genre paintings, Mount meant to motivate discussion about political and social themes central to American life.” Deborah J. Johnson, *William Sidney Mount: Painter of American Life* (New York: The American Federation of Arts, 1998), 46. I wish to further argue that viewers used narrative cues to actively construct stories about the works, rather than simply talking about politics or social stereotypes.

¹⁰ “Exhibition—National Academy of Design—Continued,” *The New Yorker* (May 26, 1838), 157.

¹¹ Quoted in Ayres, *Picturing History*, 13-14.

¹² “Tough Stories,” *Spirit of the Times: A Chronicle of the Turf, Agriculture, Field Sports, Literature, and the Stage*, June 10, 1848, 18.

¹³ Article 1 – No Title, *The Museum of Foreign Literature, Science, and Art*, February 1835, 26. This lengthy review discusses *Tough Yarns*, emphasizing the importance that such stories are “told round the galley-fire,” and explicating the importance of the “vernacular tongue” and “sea slang.” Thus, even in a review of published stories, it is their orality that is emphasized. The reviewer goes on to discuss George Cruikshank’s illustrations and includes an excerpt of “the best bit of description.”

¹⁴ Farmers’ almanacs and other agricultural publications in the United States during the nineteenth century contained calendars, weather predictions, and astronomical charts that would be useful for farmers. However, they also provided a great deal of other matter, including advertising, jokes and quips, household advice, and occasional stories. See Kristina Huff, “A Look at the American Almanac,” *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* 93, no. 2 (2014): 90-93.

¹⁵ Milton and Patricia Rickels, *Seba Smith* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977), 111.

¹⁶ “Tough Stories,” *Spirit of the Times: A Chronicle of the Turf, Agriculture, Field Sports, Literature, and the Stage*, June 10, 1848, 18.

¹⁷ Connecticut Boy [pseud.], “‘Valuable Cows,’ and Tough Stories,” *The Cultivator*, June 1843, 104.

¹⁸ “Varieties: A Tough Yarn,” *Spirit of the Times: A Chronicle of the Turf, Agriculture, Field Sports, Literature, and the Stage*, December 31, 1836, 362.

¹⁹ Yankee Blade [pseud.], “Tough Stories,” *Spirit of the Times: A Chronicle of the Turf, Agriculture, Field Sports, Literature, and the Stage*, June 10, 1848, 18. “To do something brown” was a phrase used in slang, meaning to deceive, or “take in,” perhaps deriving from the doneness associated with roasting. See “brown, adj.,” OED Online, September 2015, Oxford University Press, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/23849?rskey=v7tQG0&result=2&isAdvanced=false> (accessed October 02, 2015).

²⁰ “A Good Wife—Or a Tough Story,” *Atkinson’s Casket*, March 1837, 110.

²¹ Olive Branch [pseud.], “An Alligator Story,” *Spirit of the Times: A Chronicle of the Turf, Agriculture, Field Sports, Literature, and the Stage*, August 19, 1837, 214. Tough stories seem to share many characteristics with the kinds of knowing deceptions perpetrated by P. T. Barnum, where finding the fraud was in a way part of the entertainment offered and he manipulated his marketing so as to ensure that visitors understood that their role involved questioning authenticity. James W. Cook discussed Barnum’s masterful rhetorical strategies in James W. Cook, *The Arts of Deception: Playing with Fraud in the Age of Barnum* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

²² Connecticut Boy, “‘Valuable Cows,’” 104.

²³ The Wanderwell story, published in the December 1833 edition of *The Spirit of the Times*, is quoted in full in Caron, “Mark Twain and the Tall Tale Imagination.” In this extremely useful dissertation, Caron discusses the many precursors to the work of Mark Twain in the mid-nineteenth century, focusing on “tall talk” and “tall stories,” the various types of storytellers in these literary sources, and, most helpfully, the form that these stories tended to take.

²⁴ The story is “A Leaf from the Journal of a Tourist,” *New-York Gazette*, October 28, 1835, 2, and it is mentioned in the letter by Luman Reed to William Sidney Mount of October 29, 1835, published in Frankenstein, *William Sidney Mount*, 69-70. Although the author of the story is not indicated in the published source, some have claimed that

it was written by Seba Smith, possibly because of references to Downingville. I remain unconvinced because there were several known appropriations of Downing by other authors, but the specific authorship of the piece is less important here than the publication of yet another story about a Mount work, again reiterating the association to Smith's popular characters.

²⁵ William Sidney Mount describes this incident in an undated autobiographical sketch, possibly written in response to journalists' requests for information about his life, published in Frankenstein, *William Sidney Mount*, 16. At the least, this inclusion indicates Mount's interest in anecdote, and possibly his particular interest in tough stories. It seems a bit odd that he would include such a detailed recounting of a story told to him by his brother, which only tangentially relates to his life, in such a short autobiography. However, it unmistakably works in a mythmaking capacity, casting Mount as living and working among humorous, down-home individuals. Readers of this sketch would be faced with the same dilemma as those encountering tough stories published elsewhere: do we believe it as fact? I suggest instead that, like the popular tough stories, it relies on the reader's ability to derive humor from what is obviously a well-constructed lie.

²⁶ Neal, "Story-Telling," 1.

²⁷ Beecher, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy*, 257-258.

²⁸ "Novel Writing," *New York Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres, Arts, Science, &c.*, January 24, 1835, 149.

²⁹ "Novel Reading," *Western Luminary*, August 25, 1830, 236.

³⁰ Rev. J. T. Crane, "Novels and Novel-Reading," in *Popular Amusements* (Cincinnati: Walden & Stowe, 1869), 121-152. Of course, others defended novel reading. See "The Philosophy of Fiction," *The Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge*, March 1831, 189.

³¹ Johns, *American Genre Painting*.

³² Quoted in Frankenstein, *William Sidney Mount*, 9.

³³ Quoted in Wolff, *Richard Caton Woodville*, 14.

³⁴ Johns, *American Genre Painting*, 24-69.

³⁵ Letter from William Sidney Mount to Robert Gilmore, December 5, 1837. Republished in Nygren, *Of Time and Place*, 31. In this letter, Mount first references correspondence “of the 29th” he received from Gilmore, and then goes on to elaborate on his version of the story. The letter also provides evidence that Gilmore communicated with the artist fairly frequently, as earlier in his reply Mount referenced yet another letter, this one “of the 25th ult.”

³⁶ *The Gift: A Christmas and New Year's Present for 1842* (Philadelphia: Carey & Hart, 1841).

³⁷ Samuel Griswold Goodrich, *Recollections of a Lifetime: or Men and Things I Have Seen in a Series of Familiar Letters to a Friend* (New York: Miller, Orton, and Mulligan, 1857), quoted in Stephanie Gray Mayer Heydt, “The Art of The Gift: Edward L. Carey, William Sidney Mount, Daniel Huntington and the Antebellum Gift Book” (Ph.D. Diss., Cornell University, 1993), 28.

³⁸ A number of texts have recently been published treating the phenomena of the gift book quite thoroughly. The seminal text is still Ralph Thompson, *American Literary Annuals & Gift Books* (North Haven, CT: Archon Books, 1967). Huff, “Souvenirs of America,” focuses particularly on the books’ texts, arguing that there was a balance between a conflicting American cultural nationalism and curiosity about Europe. She continues her study of the medium in her dissertation, in which she examines gift books as a place for the intersection of commercial, political, and sentimental worlds, highlighting how activists often used them for social reform as tools in cultural crusades. Kristina Huff, “Printing Friendship and Buying Feeling: Exchange and Gift Books in the Antebellum United States” (Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 2012). Studies of gift books have frequently addressed those involved with particular places or causes, especially abolitionism and slavery. See Laura Hakala, “The Girl’s Cause: Confederate Girlhood in Uncle Buddy’s Gift Book for the Holidays and Ellen Hunter: A Story of War,” *Children’s Literature* 43 (2015): 22-50; Meaghan M. Fritz and Frank E. Fee, “To Give the Gift of Freedom: Gift Books and the War on Slavery,” *American Periodicals: A Journal of History, Criticism, and Bibliography* 23, no. 1 (2013): 60-82; Valery Levy, “Lydia Maria Child and the Abolitionist Gift-Book Market,” in *Popular Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers and the Literary Marketplace*, edited by Earl Yarrington and Mary De Jong (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2007), 137-152. Images within gift books are discussed by Adelson, “Art under Cover”; Lovejoy, “American Painting in Early Nineteenth-Century Gift Books”; and Heydt, *The Art of the Gift*. Dickinson, “Creating a World of Books, Friends, and Flowers,” examines nineteenth-century gift books primarily as objects produced in the commercial marketplace that were adopted into the private sentimental world, where they had very personal meanings. Another look at the

materiality of gift books as manipulated objects can be found in Katherine D. Harris, "Borrowing, Altering, and Perfecting the Literary Annual Form—or What It Is Not: Emblems, Almanacs, Pocket-books, Albums, Scrapbooks, and Gift Books," *Poetess Archive Journal* 1, no. 1 (2007): 1-30. For discussion of the gift book phenomenon in Great Britain, see Katherine D. Harris, *Forget Me Not: The Rise of the British Literary Annual, 1823-1835* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2015); Lorrain Janzen Kooistra, *Poetry, Pictures, and Popular Publishing: The Illustrated Gift Book and Victorian Visual Culture, 1855-1875* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2011); and Manuela Mourao, "Remembrance of Things Past: Literary Annuals' Self-Historicization," *Victorian Poetry* 50, no. 1: 107-123.

³⁹ Frankenstein, *William Sidney Mount*, 74-75; and David Kaser, *The Cost Book of Carey and Lea* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1963), 275-84.

⁴⁰ In a December 29, 1839 letter to Edward Carey, Mount wrote, "*The Gift* as a volume I think very favourably of. I must acknowledge that one of my pictures, Farmers Bargaining, is not as well engraved as I should have liked, although the Engraver assured me that he would do it as well as the price and time at which he was limited would allow. It is my opinion that in so conspicuous a place as an Annual, the engraver if he accepts of a job should do his very best, let the price be what it may." Here he indicates not only that he is pleased by *The Gift*, but also that he recognizes it as an avenue to allow his work to reach a much greater audience than usual. His concern about the quality of the engraving means that he still saw the work as firmly tied to his name and identity as an artist, and he considers publication in *The Gift* to be a serious artistic endeavor, not just popular pap. Frankenstein, *William Sidney Mount*, 76.

⁴¹ Heydt, *The Art of The Gift*, 2.

⁴² Michael L. Burdick, "Burton, William Evans," *American National Biography Online*, 2000, <http://www.anb.org/articles/16/16-00233.html> (accessed on August 25, 2015).

⁴³ Letter from W. E. Burton to William Sidney Mount, February 18, 1840, quoted in Holly Pyne Connor, "City-Country Contrasts in American Genre Painting, 1830-1860" (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers State University, 1996), 139.

⁴⁴ For instance, in the Corcoran's catalogue, published soon after the museum acquired the painting, the entry states: "It represents a real scene witnessed by the artist, who knew all the characters in it. When engraved, it furnished the theme of a story by Seba Smith. It occurred in a country bar-room—perhaps a railway station, as a time-table is affixed to the wall—and the sitting figures seem to be taking

‘something hot’ until the train arrives. The man on the left with a bandage around his head, a bandana handkerchief bound over his knee, and a crutch lying across his lap, looks rather like a hard character; an impression confirmed by the ‘deck’ of cards slipping out of his big hat lying on the floor. He is evidently a bar-room lounge, and perhaps has called for the purpose of getting up ‘a little game’ with any stray traveler. The standing figure is a country doctor, who has dropped in with his smoking friend, and, directing the latter’s attention to the lame man, makes a bet with him that their rough companion cannot answer the simplest question in a half-hour’s time. The smoker then asks the lame man whether the hurt on his bandaged leg is above or below the knee. The latter, at once, with eager eyes and pointed finger, goes into a long, discursive account of *how* he got hurt. As the half-hour expires, the smoker bored, and somewhat serious over the lost wager, puffs his smoke towards the narrator, while the doctor looks down sideways at him, and, though his eyes are concealed by the cap, his lips evidently say, ‘Didn’t I tell you so?’” Notice that even forty years after the painting was completed, reviewers still focus on the speech passing between the characters, going so far as to insert particular words into the closed mouth of the cloaked figure. *Catalogue of the Paintings, Statuary, and Casts at the Corcoran Gallery of Art*. (Washington, DC: The Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1875). The same text was published in the 1877 and 1878 editions.

⁴⁵ In two stories written by different authors, figures in Mount’s paintings were identified as Seba Smith’s characters or as residents of Downingville. An 1835 article written about *Bargaining for a Horse* told the story from the viewpoint of a narrator encountering “no less a personage than *old Joshua Downing himself*” and his friend Seth Sprague in Downingville. “A Brief Sketch of Uncle Joshua,” purportedly written by Major Jack Downing, was published in *The Wintergreen, a Perennial Gift for 1844* accompanied by Mount’s *Long Island Farmer Husking Corn* of 1834. Major Jack Downing [likely Seba Smith], “A Brief Sketch of Uncle Joshua,” *The Wintergreen: A Perennial Gift for 1844* (New York: Charles Wells & Co., 1843).

⁴⁶ Letter from Charles Lanman to William Sidney Mount, September 25, 1841, published in Frankenstein, *William Sidney Mount*, 111.

⁴⁷ The following analysis of Smith’s text is my own, relying on the story as it was published in the gift book. Seba Smith, “The Tough Yarn: or, the Cause of Jack Robinson’s Lameness,” in *The Gift: A Christmas and New Year’s Present for 1842* (Philadelphia: Carey & Hart, 1841), 99-114.

⁴⁸ Scholars who write about Mount’s paintings continually return to his inclusion of details often interpreted in a political manner, as does Elizabeth Johns in her 1991 book, yet aside from an explication of his painting *Cider Making* that appeared in the

New York American of April 14, 1841, scholars have found little evidence that contemporary viewers ever saw the social or political ramifications that we as critical scholars see today, as they tended to comment more readily on the realism of the subject matter. Heydt goes so far as to claim that their presence in gift books toned down any political interpretations, replacing them with sentimentalized stories for women readers. Still, while writers and art critics struggling to maintain their comments' appropriateness to the venues in which they appeared sometimes toned down their references, that does not mean they never understood them. See Johns, *American Genre Painting* and Heydt, *The Art of The Gift*, as well as Frederick C. Moffatt, "Barnburning and Hunkerism: William Sidney Mount's Power of Music," *Winterthur Portfolio* 29 (1994): 19-42; and Joseph B. Hudson, Jr., "Banks, Politics, Hard Cider, and Paint: The Political Origins of William Sidney Mount's Cider Making," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 10 (1975): 107-118.

⁴⁹ Letter from Luman Reed to William Sidney Mount, July 25, 1835, published in Frankenstein, *William Sidney Mount*, 69.

⁵⁰ "National Academy of Design," *New York Spectator*, April 25, 1839, 3.

⁵¹ Edgar Allan Poe, "Review," *Graham's Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine*, November 1841, 249.

⁵² Roland Barthes, "The Reality Effect," in *The Rustle of Language*, translated by Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 141.

⁵³ Quoted in Frankenstein, *William Sidney Mount*, 7-8.

⁵⁴ In his autobiographical sketch, Mount writes, "My mind from my earliest recollection was always awakened to the sublime and beautiful in nature," and in a diary entry from August 19, 1846, he returned to the subject: "Volumes have been written and works criticised to prove that it is important to study nature closely so as to give truth of expression and character to every object. Consequently I shall endeavour to copy nature as I have tried to do with truth and soberness. There has been enough written on ideality—and the grand style of Art etc—to divert the artist from the true study of natural objects. For ever after, let me read the volume of nature—a lecture always ready and bound by the Almighty." Frankenstein, *William Sidney Mount*, 17, 143.

⁵⁵ Mount discussed some of his painting techniques in his December 1846 diary entry. Frankenstein, *William Sidney Mount*, 7-8.

⁵⁶ Richard Lederer, "Foreword," in *Dictionary of Americanisms: A Glossary of Words and Phrases, Usually Regarded as Peculiar to the United States* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2003). There is an extensive body of scholarship concerning Webster. For more on the subject, see K. Alan Snyder, *Defining Noah Webster: Mind and Morals in the Early Republic* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1990); David Micklethwait, *Noah Webster and the American Dictionary* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2000); and Noah Webster, *On Being American, Selected Writings, 1783-1828* (New York: Praeger, 1967).

⁵⁷ Quoted in Lederer, "Foreword," viii.

⁵⁸ Bartlett, *Dictionary of Americanisms*, iv, xviii.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁶⁰ Caron goes into much more detail than is useful here, identifying a variety of types, including the Yankee (Jack Robinson would fit best into this category), the Backwoodsman, and the Roarer. Caron, "Mark Twain and the Tall Tale Imagination," 18-65. Much literature has been published on tall tales and tall talk in America. See David Stanley, "The Tall Tale in the United States: An Extended Example," *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica: An International Journal of Ethnography* 54, no. 1 (2009): 135-142; Sanford Pinsker, "The Tall Tale, American Humor, and America," *Midwest Quarterly* 41, no. 4 (2000): 448-457; Carolyn S. Brown, *The Tall Tale in American Folklore and Literature* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987); William F. Thompson, "Frontier Tall Talk," *American Speech* 9, no. 3 (1934): 187-199; and Rosemary D. Cox, "The Old Southwest: Humor, Tall Tales, and the Grotesque," in *A Companion to the Regional Literatures of America*, edited by Charles L. Crow (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 247-265.

⁶¹ Burns, *Pastoral Inventions*. In the second part of her book, Burns cleverly dissects the various versions of the Yankee farmer as he appeared in art and popular culture, as she points to striking similarities between literary accounts and Mount's paintings, like *Bargaining for a Horse*, arguing that the Yankee stereotype was so deeply embedded in culture that it could be drawn on freely by both artist and writer.

⁶² George W. Harris, *Sut Lovingood. Yarns Spun by a 'Nat'ral Born Durn'd Fool. Warped and Wove for Public Wear* (New York: Dick & Fitzgerald, 1867), ix.

⁶³ The story also provides an interesting case for thinking about an object—the shirt—and how it is treated and conceptualized within nineteenth-century life and literature. Sut sees it as something useful, simply to be worn, while his landlady Betts desires that it be fashionable, a symbol of lawyer-like status. As the story progresses, the shirt

stands on its own (against the house to dry) and becomes almost a character in its own right against which Sut must contend as he fights to remove it from his body. When Sut finally removes the shirt and exclaims, “Hit wer a picter tu look at,” in regards to the shirt hanging inside out from the hole in the ceiling, it becomes a spectacular sight, as the author deliberately attempts to call a visual image to the reader’s mind. Finally, the shirt is an object to be interpreted as a key to constructing a narrative; when Betts and her husband return home, they jump first to the erroneous conclusion that Sut had been skinned, and only when Betts has “walked roun hit a zaminin hit, till at las’ she venter’d clost, an’ know’d her sowin,” and thus engaging in close looking at the object, did she recognize the object, shifting the interpretation to Sut getting in a fight where his hair got pulled out, foolishly, in his finest shirt. Ibid.

⁶⁴ Robert Gilmore sent the work for exhibition at the National Academy of Design annual in 1838, the Philadelphia Artists’ Fund Society show in 1840, and the first exhibition at the Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore in 1848. New York, National Academy of Design, 23 April-7 July 1838, *Thirteenth Annual Exhibition*, cat. No. 308; Philadelphia, Artists’ Fund Society, 6 May-after 30 May 1840, *Fifth Exhibition of the Artists’ Fund Society of Philadelphia*, cat. No. 38 (as *The Old Story*); Baltimore, Maryland Historical Society, 1848, *Paintings, Engravings, &c at the Picture Gallery of the Maryland Historical Society, First Annual Exhibition*, cat. No. 208. I’d like to thank the curators and staff at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, especially Emily Shapiro, for their excellent provenance research, during which they discovered these early exhibitions.

⁶⁵ William Spohn Baker, *American Engravers and Their Works* (Philadelphia: Gebbie & Barrie, 1875), 125-127.

⁶⁶ “Literary Items,” *The United States Magazine of Science, Art, Manufactures, Agriculture, Commerce and Trade*, November 15, 1854, 218.

⁶⁷ Seba Smith, “The Tough Yarn,” *The United States Magazine of Science, Art, Manufactures, Agriculture, Commerce and Trade*, January 15, 1855; and Seba Smith, “The Tough Yarn,” *Emerson’s Magazine and Putnam’s Monthly*, February 1858, 156.

⁶⁸ For a discussion of the importance of noise and quietude in paintings of banjo players, which I take as a model for my own thinking, see Mazow, *Picturing the Banjo*, 96-113. See also Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth-Century America*; and Richard Rath, “Sounding the Chesapeake: Indian and English Soundways in the Settling of Jamestown,” paper presented to the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Mar. 16, 2000, <http://way.net/rcr/chesapeake>.

⁶⁹ See Janice Gray Armstrong, Ed., *Catching the Tune: Music and William Sidney Mount* (Stony Brook, NY: The Museums at Stony Brook, 1984); Moffatt, "Barnburning and Hunkerism"; and E. Greguski, "William Sidney Mount's Musician Series," *Nineteenth Century* 28, no. 1 (2008): 10-17.

⁷⁰ Greguski, "William Sidney Mount's Musician Series," 14.

⁷¹ Johns has thoroughly discussed this painting, along with others, and its marginalization of the African American figure. See her fourth chapter, "Standing Outside the Door," Johns, *American Genre Painting*, 100-136. Moffatt interestingly points out the somatic response of the African American listener to the music, indicating that his left hand curls to mimic the musician's grip on the fiddle neck. Moffatt, "Barnburning and Hunkerism," 22. See also Bruce Robertson, "The Power of Music: A Painting by William Sidney Mount," *Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 79, no. 2 (February 1992): 38-62.

⁷² For a more detailed discussion of the development of phonography, see Kreilkamp, *Voice and the Victorian Storyteller*, 30; and Lisa Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines: Representing Technology in the Edison Era* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 22-44.

⁷³ Kreilkamp, *Voice and the Victorian Storyteller*, 30.

⁷⁴ For more on painted renderings of Shakespearean scenes, see Stuart Sillars, *Painting Shakespeare: The Artist as Critic, 1720-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁷⁵ See Wolff, *Richard Caton Woodville*, 20-22.

⁷⁶ Mazow, "From Sonic to Social," 103-104.

⁷⁷ Letter from William Sidney Mount to Charles Lanman, September 9, 1847, quoted in Connor, "City-Country Contrasts in American Genre Painting," 108.

⁷⁸ Frankenstein, *William Sidney Mount*, 131-132.

⁷⁹ Jennifer Roberts has recently published a wonderful book concerning the ways in which images engaged with transport. She focused on how pictures traveled throughout British America between 1760 and 1860, thinking about the physical movement of images and how this movement affected viewers' reception and memories of artworks, as well as the stylistic choices the artists made in the first place. I am engaging a rather different definition of "transport," not as it relates to physical

movement at all, but rather the mental distance an image can allow the viewer to travel into imagined spaces. See Jennifer L. Roberts, *Transporting Visions: The Movement of Images in Early America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

⁸⁰ Garrett Stewart, *The Look of Reading: Book, Painting, Text* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 2.

Chapter 4

HOW TO SEE A STORY: REPRESENTATIONS FOR CHILDREN IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN VISUAL CULTURE

Oral history, physical contact with the past, textual documentation, and visual imagery—if William Sidney Mount’s *Great-Grandfather’s Tale of the Revolution* of 1852 (Figure 23) represents these four methods of passing stories to the younger generation, it is this last method that the artist most emphasized. Greene shares his viewpoint with only one of the children, the youngest girl, Harriet Louise. She peeks over his shoulder, craning her neck to gaze upon the life mask of General Washington, so carefully limned in purest white against the dark backdrop to set it apart from its surroundings. This naturally makes sense, as Mount’s profession meant he was heavily invested in the valuation and role that visual art had to play in storytelling and history-making. His painting served as a physical thing that extended this mode of learning to the viewer, who also encounters history here through the visual. Yet interpreting images, like reading, was a skill that needed to be developed, and the words spoken or written in front of or about images emphasized the idea that images rarely stood alone as silent, instinctively understood arbiters. Greene is, after all, speaking while pointing to the life mask, and the reviewers who wrote about the painting also interpreted the work for its audience.

The process of viewing an image, and particularly drawing a story out of or associating one already known with that image, formed a key part of the middle-class white nineteenth-century child’s education and cognitive development. It impacted the ways in which he or she might encounter and interpret art in the future, like the

many storytelling images we have seen in other chapters. A child's pictorial education took place across an array of media that provide evidence of this process, from classroom primers to Sunday school readers, the *Rollo* books of Jacob Abbott, object lessons at home and in the schoolroom, visual amusements, and illustrated fairy tales. These images and texts taught children visual codes of looking to enable them from an early age to see stories and morals in images, preparing them to participate in a larger visual social world and giving them skills that would enable them to be better informed citizens of a story-viewing and storytelling nation.

Pictures in the Classroom

In 1838, Warren Burton published a recollection of his primary education, begun 35 years before, in a memoir, *The District School as It Was by One Who Went to It*. Among other things, he recounted his experiences when a new schoolmaster arrived to tend to the education of the local youths: "He had his hands too full of the great things of the great scholars to take much notice of me, excepting to hear me read my Abs four times a day. This exercise he went through like a great machine and I like a little one, so monotonous was the humdrum and regular the recurrence of ab, eb, ib, ob, ub, &c. from day to day, and week to week."¹ Burton's is a familiar lament among educational theoreticians during the mid-nineteenth century. As O. S. Fowler grumbled in his treatise on the subject, "children from three years old and upwards, are sent to school to set on a bench and say A; or, to spell A B, ab; or , B A, ba, K E R, ker, ba-ker, &c., which they do by *rote*, just as a parrot says 'pretty poly,' and know just as much about it, and it does them 'nearly' as much good."² On first glance through some of the primers with which teachers provided children during late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century America, learning to read seems a very dull

prospect indeed. Burton tells his readers that he, like many of his generation, learned from the prolifically published *The Only Sure Guide to the English Tongue*, by *William Perry* (Figure 49), which demanded only faith and memory from its owner, not understanding. He dismisses most of that text's contents as "talk about vowels and consonants, diphthongs and triphthongs, monosyllables and polysyllables, orthography and punctuation...all which was about as intelligible to us, who were obliged to commit it to memory, year after year, as the fee-faw-fum, uttered by the giant in one of our story books."³

Yet in contrast to this dismissive attitude towards the book's matter, Burton devotes three full pages to a description of Perry's frontispiece (Figure 50), the only woodcut print in the entire book. He faithfully enumerates the two scenes involved and describes them in every particular, representing boys climbing an apple tree above and a schoolroom below, where the schoolmaster "was pictured as an elderly man, with an immense wig enveloping his head and bagging about his neck, and with a face that had a sort of half-way look, or rather, perhaps, a compound look, made up of an expression of perplexity at a sentence in parsing, or a sum in arithmetic, and a frown at the playful urchins in the distant seats." The discussion becomes the means of presenting a joke from his childhood, contrasting the two realms with the moral, "play truant and be happy." Still, the author's memory of and attention to the figurative and less erudite meanings of the image portraying the fruits of education provide insight into what made the most impact upon students, or at least this one student, set down in a classroom. Although he does lament the fact that "no one took the trouble to explain it [the frontispiece] to me," it is to the image that Burton returns.⁴

Even though primary education during the nineteenth century, whether at home or school, focused largely on reading text and elocution, there was usually an element of the pictorial. As the century progressed, bringing changes in technology that facilitated a printing boom as early as the 1820s, this focus on images for the consumption and education of children increased. Sometimes, this meant teaching through images. Primers used pictures as mnemonic devices to incite more interest in the alphabet, resulting in what Patricia Crain calls the “alphabet array, or the worldly alphabet,” in which the alphabet becomes its own microcosm associated with a varied mix of external objects, in an apparent attempt to categorize and organize the natural world (Figures 46-47).⁵ Burton provides proof of the memory-driving potential of associating images or objects with letters. He describes his entry into the Schoolhouse at the age of three and a half, when the only letters he knew were “capital A, because it stood at the head of the column, and was the similitude of a harrow frame. Of O, also, from its resemblance to a hoop. Its sonorous name, moreover, was a frequent passenger through my mouth, after I had begun to articulate, its ample sound being the most natural medium by which man born unto trouble signifies the pains of his lot. X, too, was familiar, as it seemed so like the end of the old saw-horse that stood in the wood-shed.”⁶ Here he emphasizes that he remembered his letters as a young boy largely because of their resemblance to physical objects, reminiscent of those “noun pictures” in early primers, as well as the auditory delight they might produce.

At times, booksellers touted images as ways to draw and hold a child’s interest or to set apart one publishing venture among its many competitors. An advertisement for *Illuminated Household Stories for Little Folks* claims, “That this edition of these Stories may be more perfect than any other extant, the publisher has embellished it

with exquisite specimens of high Pictorial Art, from which Children may derive those correct ideas that will mature into the beautiful and grand.”⁷ This could in fact be an important distinction, as this represented one among dozens of editions of the popular story “Jack and the Beanstalk.” Additionally, editors sometimes chose images particularly to communicate the morals or ideals of a book’s author or publisher, as in religious texts printed by the American Sunday School Union or the American Tract Society.⁸

However, by mid-century, material for children benefited from a growing interest in theorizing the ways in which images must be interpreted in a learned manner, as well as the cognitive and social benefits of deriving a story from those images. Children found more and more venues for this action—tying together storytelling and imagery—actively, not just through so-called “passive” illustration.⁹ Some authors specifically drew children’s attention to images, referencing them in text and encouraging close looking, and nineteenth-century educational science advocated this for the best mental and social development.

In 1842, Orson Squire Fowler passionately defended the necessity of tailoring educational techniques specifically to the mental faculties working “in harmony with the laws of the mind.” For this extensively published phrenologist, then the editor of the *American Phrenological Journal*, his field provided the key to developing a comprehensive educational system. He analyzed the intellectual faculties and found ways to stimulate those that are particularly desirable for children at an early age. Fowler argued that “all children have an insatiable curiosity to see, see, see everything; to know all about whatever is passing; and to ask *what* is this, and *what* is that; together with a remarkably retentive memory of stories, facts, and what they have

seen, heard, or read. Besides being a proof of the truth of Phrenology, this shows *how to educate children*; namely, by *showing them things*.”¹⁰ Before being forced to sit and say ‘A,’ children should exercise their “Individuality,” also known as the “looking faculty,” beginning with the more naturally interesting skills of observation, and proceeding only later towards the more arbitrary exercise of reading. He then advocated moving into an exploration of the faculty of “Eventuality,” which includes the desire to hear and tell anecdotes, explaining the causes and effects of events. He pointed to the fruitlessness of forcing children to recite meaningless syllables, concluding, “But only tell them a story, or just show and explain passing things to them, and they are instantly electrified with interest. Their attention is riveted, and their *memory* of the story, or of the thing seen, is powerfully excited, and the *organ* of Eventuality exercised, and thereby enlarged.”¹¹ Fowler argued the profitability of both pictures and narrative, setting them up as two fundamental pillars of a child’s learning experience. This attitude licensed the flood of imagery appearing in publications as the century progressed.

This is not to say that noun-pictures, representations of lone objects, ceased appearing in books destined for children’s consumption. Plenty of books, primers, and pictorial readers still focused on these tiny woodcuts, most of which were stock images found in some incarnation in most of the print shops in publishing centers across America, and thus cheap and efficient to reproduce over and over again. Crain argues that these object images were “isolated from their usefulness, isolated as well from any binding imaginative narrative, and quite often from any kind of verbal play...atomized, adrift on the page, unmodulated by any assessment or evaluation...in an aesthetics of accumulation and accretion.”¹² When one spends days in the archive,

paging through dozens of nineteenth-century primers, pictorial readers, and textbooks designed for children, and repeatedly encounters that same alphabet array over and over again, sometimes represented several times with different sets of images in the same book, it is easy to agree with this assessment. For instance, *The National Pictorial Primer*, published in New York in 1846, contains three separate tables, distributed throughout the book, pairing images with letters. A more diverse array, including varied objects and animals (e.g., ape, boy, egg, fan, gun) is followed twenty pages later by one representing only animals, and ten pages after that, an assortment of birds (Figures 51-55).¹³

Still, such devices were often more complicated in their usage than one might expect. Authors urged teachers and students to dwell on their representations at length, gleaning as much meaning and discussion as possible from them. In her *Pictorial Definer* (Figure 56), Elizabeth Oram aspired to move beyond the physicality of objects depicted in the included engravings, by adding relative words with literal and figurative meanings, in order to “point to higher ideas,” while simultaneously leading to an understanding of such abstract thoughts that is nevertheless “based on things seen and known, and not on the flimsy cobwebs of theory, which are often formed from words alone.”¹⁴ And so, a modest acorn may serve as the foundation for a larger discussion of the nature of commerce, necessitating that the child be able to make that more abstract connection, projecting the growth of that acorn into a great oak, its transformation into wood for shipbuilding, and the ship’s role as a transporter of the nation’s trade goods. Sometimes authors inserted pictures into educational textbooks on the basis of scientific discourse. T. H. Gallaudet based his exposition on the categorization and discussion of such objects on his experience instructing the deaf

and dumb, couching his explanations in the language of experiment and classification (Figure 57). He contended that “the language of pictures, being founded in Nature, and thus a Universal Language, may, like the signs and gestures and pantomime employed in the instruction of the deaf and dumb, be used, as a key or translation to illustrate and explain written or printed language.”¹⁵ Although he ignored the fact that a tent, as he describes it, is far from a universally recognized object, Gallaudet relied heavily on the conception of his modern world as one in which goods circulate freely. He then provided a template for the instructor to use, accompanying the image with an oral explanation and a series of questions, prompting the student to come up with additional examples of items sharing given qualities with the provided objects.

A Picture and a Story

Despite the authors’ urgings for the teacher to involve students in more in-depth discussions, these noun-pictures are little more than jumping-off points, elements of visual interest that tie abstract concepts to representations of physical objects. Seeing a story within a picture required far more, as Fowler advocated and as became increasingly important for viewer comprehension as narrative scenes of everyday life teemed in the story books, newspapers, and art galleries of the day. Although much has been made of the proliferation of alphabets and noun pictures in children’s schoolbooks, the fact remains that for the most part, in any but the most basic, eight-page pamphlets published after 1820, these noun-pictures were decidedly not the emphasis of most of the text.¹⁶ Instead, authors filled most of the book with a series of lessons pairing an engraved image with a text of varying length about that image. For example, although the *National Pictorial Primer* focused three full pages on separate alphabet arrays, it also included 35 reading and spelling lessons, each

pairing text with one to two images: 2 ¾ x 1 in. rectangular genre scenes with fairly complicated settings and action, rather than just an object or a person or two. The images are highly varied in their subject matter, more so than in most primers. While the book contains the usual scenes of play and animals, there are also images of industry (a coal mine), farming, exotic locales (Africa and India), the dangers of drink, trade and merchants, technology and transport (the railroad, ships, canals, bridges, and a steamboat), and historical scenes (William Penn, George Washington, and William Tell). The text tends to call attention to the picture, working in harmony with it and providing extra information. In Lesson XXI, for example, alluding to an image captioned “The Railroad,” the text returns the child to the picture. It references “that lit-tle car in front,” encouraging the reader’s eyes to bounce back to the picture and find the object in question, before continuing to read, and the phrase “It is al-most out of sight,” does the same thing. What small child could resist looking back to make sure the train is still visible, before imagining it in the kind of speedy motion the author describes? Through all of this, the author has managed to explain in basic terms the workings of a steam engine, the speed of the transport, and the number of people it can carry. He has also attached aural elements to allow the child to play and mouth the onomatopoeic sounds as he imagines the “Ding, dong, bell!” and “Puff! Puff! Puff!” noises that emit from the massive engine (Figure 58).¹⁷

The mid-nineteenth century saw a slew of books pairing a genre scene with a brief blurb of text. These served as venues for youngsters to practice their reading and implicitly their interpretation of pictures, extending visual literacies to massive amounts of children. The American Sunday School Union (ASSU) was perhaps the most prolific publisher of works for children during this time period. Established in

Philadelphia in 1824, the ASSU published over 800,000 items in its first year, including reward books, tracts, catechisms, spelling books, alphabet cards, and reward tickets. Most of its publications capitalized on the belief that children learning to read were susceptible to religious conversion, and that they might share religious messages with illiterate adults around them as they shared their newfound reading skills. These circulation numbers continued to grow over the following years; by 1828, production numbers had risen to 2.5 million items, including over one million Picture Reward Tickets, which were small scraps of paper with triumphant imagery designed for teachers to reward students for excellent performance. The widely available books were also squarely within the price ranges of most American families.¹⁸ The association designated paid colporteurs to carry the materials around the country within assigned territories, sometimes giving free publications to their target audience, which particularly focused on families with children who could learn to read while simultaneously quietly reaffirming Christian doctrine for their parents and themselves. An advertisement on the back of a large set of lithographs from the 1850s lists the variety of materials available for order, as well as their prices. For instance, one could acquire forty-eight children's tracts, books of four pages each, with one to two "neat and appropriate cuts," in packages of twenty-four for four cents; a pack of "Illustrated Scripture Cards" for sixteen cents; *The Union Spelling Book* for six and a quarter cents per copy; or one hundred copies of *The Union Primer* for \$2.00.¹⁹

The ASSU publications expanded to encompass picture books of all kinds, including *Picture Stories for Girls* (1853), *The Book of One Hundred Pictures* (1861), and *The Second Book of 100 Pictures* (1861), among others. In each case, the woodblock prints are all genre scenes, grouped into sections and arranged by themes,

such as home scenes, scenes of travel, the scriptures, and animate nature. Here, the focus is less on explaining the modes of representation and more on making sure the viewer knows to derive a moral from any given image and the story it represents. A great many of those morals repeat, in one form or another, creating a stock set of easily remembered lessons, rather like Bible verses, for the child's internalization. These included the necessity of obedience to one's elders, the goodness of kind deeds, the need to see past surfaces, and the value and fragility of books. The books are replete with the missionary impulse that drove the Sunday School Union. For instance, the Scenes of Travel section of *The Book of One Hundred Pictures* includes an image of "The Log-House" (Figure 59), a crude woodcut depicting a nailed-together shack, with a number of children sitting or lounging in front of it, focusing on an older girl speaking to them. The text below locates the image on the "prairies of the West," where things are rude but filled with "virtue and godliness," thanks in part to the fact that the Sunday-School missionary has been there and "left some good books for them to read." Some images are more narrative than others, as are the texts with which they're paired, as in "The Break-Down," which emphasizes the folly of ignoring a parent's strictures, resulting in the overturning of a stolen wagon (Figure 60).²⁰

This format, pairing a genre scene with a short textual description and usually containing a moral extracted from the image, was so prevalent in mid-nineteenth-century children's books—repeated literally one hundred times in each of the aforementioned ASSU books—that it represents a habitual, learned method through which a child would encounter and interpret a scene of everyday life. Not only were children building up a repertoire of stock scenes that repeated here and elsewhere—a

mother reading to her child, children pitying a poor old blind woman, a child sick in bed, sledding down a hillside—they were learning the skills to quickly assign an abstracted moral or meaning to that image. It is probable that the ASSU had access to a number of stock woodcuts, to which they would assign moral meanings, manipulating the image by ascribing appropriate stories to a scene. Indeed, in at least one case, the same woodcut appeared in different publications, produced eight years apart, and with different stories, although the resultant moral lesson was quite similar.

Consider “The Young Friends,” an engraving in the 1853 *Picture Stories for Girls* (Figure 61). The editor assigned a rather detailed, four-page story about two young girls, Clare and Constance, who grew up together, sharing their lives, toils, and play as the best of friends. On a stormy fall day, the girls went missing, and everyone began searching for them, including the narrator, an older neighbor who finds them as evening descends in the woods; Clare carries Constance, who fell and hurt her ankle, proving the moral that good children find “their chief pleasure in making and giving pleasure, or saving pain to others.” It is obvious that the writer has decided on the chief questions that the woodcut inspires, and carefully answered each: who are these people? Why is one girl carrying the other? Why are they in the woods? Why is there a man watching from a distance? The woodcut illustrates the ultimate moment, and it is told from the point of view of the man standing distant in the background, observing the two girls; the writer has gone on at length to describe a variety of narratives and scenes in order to elucidate the characters of the two girls and their motivations.

By contrast, in *The Book of One Hundred Pictures*, the author titled the same image “The Swollen Brook,” and the accompanying text narrates a story in which

snowmelt floods a stream, so that two little girls are stranded on one side. Maria tries to carry little Ninny in her arms, but a kindly farmer comes along to help them, resulting in the moral, “A kind deed will never lose its reward.” This parable fits neatly into the moralistic program of the ASSU, yet there is little evidence that the writer of this passage spent much time looking at the image at all: the main element of the accompanying text is not even pictured, as there is no sign of a stream or water of any kind in the image. The need to imagine extraneous elements outside the picture field is not unheard of, and yet the so-called farmer in the background bears a top hat and cane. Nevertheless, each interpretation provides a hint of the ways in which nineteenth-century viewers approached, narrated, and derived meaning from imagery, even if that meaning is here idealized to provide a prescriptive message.²¹

Elsewhere, authors took the time to make certain that children were aware of the fact that a single image might tell many different stories. They pointed out what to modern interpreters has become a standard, post-structuralist strategy: that meaning is not fixed, but is rather constructed by viewers, writers, and the context that one might bring to that image. In “Picture for a Story,” an article written for the *Well-Spring*, a youth-oriented magazine during 1861, the author supposed that six different readers would imagine six different stories for a given wood engraving, which had been selected from the Priest and Children series of a printer’s stock specimen book (Figure 62). She wrote her own version of the tale, and then two months later, the magazine published a different story sent in by a reader, transparently admitting that it was acceptable for magazines to include mass-produced images in their productions.²²

Jacob Abbott's Talking Pictures

Interpreting images and assigning narratives to them were thus skills that, by the mid-nineteenth century, viewers had to exercise on a regular basis to deal with the booming pictorial production by artists, as well as those by printmakers that flooded the mass market. Although erudite adult readers might turn to the writings of art theorists and reviewers to develop these skills, the children's author Jacob Abbott provided a surprisingly sophisticated venue for pondering the nature of images in his book *Rollo Learning to Talk*, first published in Boston and then Philadelphia in 1835, and republished again and again over the next 30 years. A representative of the Boston publisher, John Allen and Co., which had fallen on difficult economic times, approached Abbott with a collection of unused engravings, asking him if he could make something of them. Years later, the author claimed, "He gave me [the] proofs, and I began to see what I could do. In that way I made the first Rollo Book."²³

Thus, the Rollo series, which became one of the most famous produced by a nineteenth-century American children's author, began with a set of images. Abbott developed a methodology for responding to images that resulted in the imagination and creation of a young boy, a hypothetical viewer. His organizational system idealized a persona that went on, in future years, to experience all kinds of adventures in this long series of books. Images spawned character, thought, and action. The series eventually comprised twenty-eight volumes and was published between 1834 and 1858. The books followed the adventures of a young American boy, Rollo, as he learned to talk, read, and explore his native environs in the New England countryside, and then as he traveled through Europe with his Uncle George.

Abbott intended *Rollo Learning to Talk* for the use of families at home and included specific directions for a mother to read the book with her child, perhaps

building on Catherine Beecher's notions that it was the woman's role to educate children within the household to prepare them as young republican citizens.²⁴ The author tasks the mother with using the book's text as a basic script in establishing a dialogue with her as-yet non-reading child about a series of engravings, while allowing him to ask questions and closely look at each image in turn. He instructs her to act out described motions, read distinctly and conversationally, and allow the child to lead and guide the exercise. The ultimate goal is for this child to later shift into the role of explaining the pictures and "tell the stories, in his own way, from memory, to a younger child," having internalized, memorized, and firmly associated them with certain pictorial cues.²⁵ From the very beginning, the book sets up a familial and very domestic dynamic. It is within the aegis of the woman's lap, guided by her kind and authoritative voice, that this interaction takes place. That closeness is practically guaranteed by the very format of the text, which, unlike most children's picture books, is not meant for a child who can or is already learning to read. The format designs for the child's entire attention to be focused on the twin poles of the images and his mother's face, and in this case that is the correct, rather than the indulgent, thing to do. The situation is carefully set up to echo that archetypal image that accompanies so many representations of the mother-child relationship in the mid-nineteenth century, where she reads to her children, who cluster about her like upturned flowers in a garden (Figure 63).

The book begins with "Feeding the Chickens" (Figure 64).

Here is a picture of a little girl feeding the chickens. Little girl!* [*Call 'Little girl!' in the tone you would use if you really expected an answer, and pause a moment for a reply. So in all similar cases.] Little girl, did you know that you had left the gate open? Little girl, I say, little girl, did you know that you had left the gate open? She does not

know what I say, she does not hear me; she is nothing but a picture of a girl. She has come out to feed her chickens. I can see the house she lives in. Do you see it? Where is it? Touch it with your finger. It stands back among the trees. I should like to go into that little gate, and walk along under the trees, and go into that house. Who do you think lives there? I think it must be that little girl's father and mother. She took a little wooden bowl with a handle, and has come out to feed the chickens; and the hens too. There are some large hens. One is running very fast to get some of the corn. I rather think that is corn she is feeding the hens and chickens with. Run, Biddy, run, run, run fast, or you will lose all your corn. Don't you see the little chickens? How many are there? You may count the chickens. Now you may count the hens. They are all picking up the corn. And there stands the rooster, too, opening his mouth to crow. He says, cock-a-doodle-doo, cock-a-doodle-doo! Do you know why they call him a roost-er? It is because he roosts. When it is night do you suppose those hens go to bed, and lie down and cover themselves up with clothes and go to sleep? No indeed; they do not do that. If you should put one of them into a bed in that way, she would jump out and run away as fast as she could. What do you think the hens do when they want to go to sleep? Why, they get up on a long pole and cling to it with their long, sharp claws, and sleep there on a high pole. And that is roosting. So they call the great cock a roost-er. Do you think you could sleep on a high pole?²⁶ (10-13)

Abbott scripts this seemingly simplistic passage to an unbelievable degree, patronizing the female/mother reader. Still, this and the many texts that follow after it, while addressed to a child, nevertheless provide many basic lessons regarding how one should approach, interpret, and understand narrative visual imagery, couched in its seemingly inane discussion of running biddies and crowing roosters. In fact, it begins with contemplation of the nature of representation itself, delineating the relationship of distance between a viewer and what is represented, as well as the impossibility of talking to or addressing a character in a picture; "she is nothing but a picture of a little girl." Since the girl can't answer the viewer's question, a child must find another method for interrogating the image and its situation, one that the author suggests in what follows.

The text prompts the listener to look closely at an image, locating specific details, and physically interacting with the page/picture. While the instruction to locate an object and “touch it with your finger” may cause modern museum professionals and librarians to shudder reflexively, this cue, which recurs over and over again throughout the book, refers the listener back to the image again and again. The author elicits a learned active engagement, a behavior paradigm that may continue in less physical ways to affect patterns of looking in the future. He asks the child to project himself into the scene, exercising his imagination and making the situation more real, as if it’s a part of his world. The text specifically asks the child to imagine, make deductions, and expand upon the story and the situation, drawing upon his own experiences and memories, since the information regarding who might live in the house isn’t present in the image itself. The child engages in close looking at the image, picking particular objects central to the story being told.

This process also establishes the idea of sequence and narrative time...the little girl did something before she exited the house, which makes NOW possible. Then a meditation on future consequences follows: what will happen in the future, if the hen doesn’t run fast enough? By pointing to the running hen, the author distinguishes between the appearances of movement and stillness, then presents, imagines, and vocalizes sound with the onomatopoeia of the rooster’s crow, drawing the viewer into a constructed, multisensory environment.

Later images expand upon and complement the skills the child is gaining with each dialogue. In “The Dog in the Water” (Figure 65), he learns how transparency of water and space are represented: “His legs look faint. His back looks distinct. The reason why his legs look faint is because they are under the water, and we cannot see

them very plain.” This teaches a lesson about representational codes, and how choices about color, line, and clarity can allow viewers to draw conclusions about a situation once they understand the codes. He learns that stories are built from an image when one questions events and their causes, finding out “why” something is happening so he might expand upon the story: why is the dog in the water? To rescue the girl. The author draws emotions into the action when he describes the mother as frightened, even here where facial features are obscured and we must read her hands-clasped gesture and imagine that her emotions are what ours would be. The absence of something in the image, such as detailed faces, etc., does not preclude finding meaning. As the text progresses, the child receives basic lessons in ways of creating spatial perception (the cow only has one visible eye, because the other is on the other side of her head; Figure 66); distortion and foreshortening (the hoop and hat are really round, even though they don’t appear to be so in the picture; Figure 67); perspective (the hawk only looks small because he is seen at a distance; Figure 68); and the necessity of imagining colors (“Leaves are green, and flowers are blue, and red, and yellow. They are not green, and red, and blue in the picture, because they could not make the colors in the picture, very well. But they are green, and red, and blue, in reality.” Figure 69). In other instances, Abbott asks the child to imagine the sound that might have startled a rabbit, ascribing an aural component to the visual field (Figure 70); the action continuing beyond the field of vision presented in a picture; and a dialogue that might occur between two depicted characters, as a small boy leaps to showcase his discovery of a butterfly to his mother (Figure 71). One of the main goals for the book and, in Abbott’s methodology, presumably for picture viewing in general is to think about the value judgments one should place upon supposed actions

by characters that behave morally or immorally. There is even a degree of intertextuality, as the author asks the child at various points to remember earlier images he has seen, compare them, and arrive at conclusions based on the similarities or differences he finds, a basic analytical skill. Presumably this same mental exercise will affect how the child sees any similar pictures or themes in the future, in other venues.²⁷

Rolling Learning to Talk concludes with a meditation on the difference between learning to talk and learning to read, focusing on the benefits of the latter. At no point does the author openly acknowledge that there is a third way to tell stories—through pictures—although that is obviously what this book has been doing all along. Throughout, the text explains many of the codes that render pictures comprehensible and narrative: perspective; imagined color; projection of the picture beyond itself, both in space and time; imagined dialogue and sound; clues about character based on gesture, dress, and motion; reliance on memory and experience in determining actions; and telling objects (depicted objects which are rendered so significant by understood cultural codes that both artist and viewer understand that they are integral to the story to be told).²⁸ Essentially, this small book establishes a paradigm about how one should approach any image as a ground for discussion and interpretation, one which will affect subsequent interactions with imagery, whether on the pages of a book or on the walls of a gallery. It also provides evidence of the complex negotiations that could determine meaning in even the most basic of engravings, those that modern viewers often gloss over or ignore because of their lack of controversial or particularly intriguing subject matter. One reviewer even claimed that the book was “suggestive, and will teach parents as well as children.”²⁹

Despite its seemingly simplistic nature at first glance, *Rollo Learning to Talk* actually presents its users with an introduction to visual analysis, startlingly reminiscent of handouts given to students in art historical surveys in contemporary college classrooms. This sophistication is less surprising, however, when one considers the background and goals of the little book's author. Born in Hallowell, Maine, in 1803, into a staunchly middle-class New England family, Jacob Abbott delved deeply into the world of education, attending school at Brunswick, the Hallowell Academy, and Bowdoin College, where he studied the physical sciences and graduated in 1820. Subsequently, he tutored and taught locally, studied theology at Andover Seminary, and became a professor of mathematics and natural philosophy at Amherst College in 1825, before moving on to found the progressive Mount Vernon School for Girls in Boston in 1828. He later served as minister at the Eliot Congregational Church in Roxbury, Massachusetts, from 1834 to 1835, and helped his brothers found and conduct the Mount Vernon School for Boys and Abbott's Institution in New York City, from 1843 to 1851. From 1832 on, however, Abbott largely concentrated his attention on his literary work, achieving fame as a morally upright author of literature for children beginning with *The Young Christian*. Though he was a prolific author of more than one hundred books, Abbott was best known for his famous Rollo series. During Abbott's lifetime, critics almost universally praised his works, with several reviewers claiming that his name alone passed as a recommendation of any new book, while others pointed out that, while the literature was didactic and moralizing, they were designed to appeal to children's desire for play and entertainment, which reviewers variously saw as a positive or a negative trait. The *Christian Examiner and General Review* reported, "For Mr. Abbott fully carries

out, in these books, the great principle which we rejoice to see advanced in the Preface to one of them, namely, ‘that it is generally better, in dealing with children, to allure them to what is right by agreeable pictures of it, than to attempt to drive them to it by repulsive delineations of what is wrong.’”³⁰

After pointing out Rollo’s pioneering position as one of the first “real” boys in American children’s literature due to his tendency to be neither perfectly good nor despicably bad, scholarship on these works has focused largely on the moralizing, didactic nature of the books. Scholars claim that they served as agents of acculturation for middle-class youths destined to take their places in an orderly, democratic society, and then focus on what they did *not* acknowledge—the social realities of urbanization, industrialization, immigration, poverty, and racial discrimination (although, as Mary E. Quinlivan observes, Abbott and his family were largely anti-slavery in their views, if not always actively so, and he focused several books on black characters just before the advent of the Civil War). All of this is undoubtedly true. However, such interpretations could in part result from the fact that Abbott’s mission was not to alleviate many of the social ills of his day, but rather to reform and supplement the educational system that he had spent so much time observing, both as a teacher and as a father of six, in order to better prepare children to face their futures.³¹

As scholars in the past have repeated argued, nineteenth-century America saw significant changes in the ways that children were seen by parents and educators. As the philosophical notions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Locke penetrated American thinking, they displaced many of the earlier, Puritanical and religious-based conceptions of children that had dominated in colonial New England. No longer did society see a child predominantly as the heir of original sin, naturally depraved and in

need of punishment, training, and obedience. Historian Karen Calvert has identified three epochs in the history of American childhood: 1) the period from 1600 to 1750, when children were viewed as unformed adults, who had to be gotten through the dangers of infancy quickly; 2) the period of “the natural child,” from 1750 to 1830, based on Rousseau and Locke’s teachings that a child was in a state of developmental flux, not a problem to be fixed; and 3) from 1830 to 1900, when the “innocent child” needed to be protected and kept separate from the adult world. During the mid-nineteenth century, a flood of advice literature concerning the nurture of children hit the American publishing market, and authors like Catherine Beecher and Lydia Maria Child urged mothers to change their ways of thinking about youths, who were now future republicans and were inherently innocent and in need of love and tending. Abbott positioned himself at the forefront of this wave of educational reform, both at home and at school. He advocated changes in many of the policies that educators had long taken for granted, chief among them the need for corporal or scornful verbal punishment, which he saw as violent, unnecessary, and founded on the angry desire for vengeance against misbehaving children, when it was really the parent who was lacking.³²

Abbott’s educational reform took many avenues, both in his public and private life. He delivered lectures before the American Institute of Instruction, published articles on how parents should interact with teachers and the use of punishment in educational journals like the *American Annals of Education*, and instituted reforms emphasizing student self-government and persuasion rather than punishment at the Mount Vernon School for Girls. In the last ten years of his life, he even established a voluntary school on his property in the small town of Farmington, Maine, for his

grandchildren and their friends. There they learned mathematics by using surveyor's tools and conducting Abbott's banking business, and governance by establishing mock courts to judge each other's misbehavior. Each of his published books for children worked to advance his educational goals, which were most clearly laid out in two tomes neatly bookending the most productive years of his literary career: John Abercrombie's *Inquiries Concerning the Intellectual Powers, and the Investigation of Truth*, published with an introduction by Abbott in Boston in 1835; and Abbott's didactic manual, published in 1871, *Gentle Measures in the Management and Training of the Young*, which summed up many of his beliefs and practices, instituted over the past 40 years.³³

Abercrombie's text on intellectual philosophy presented its reader with a meditation on the workings of the human mind and its acquisition and use of knowledge, beginning with sensation and perception. It discussed the accumulation of sense data that results from the interactions of the various senses and the voluntary effort required to actually perceive, understand, and remember what is sensed. The key to this process is attention.³⁴ Abercrombie returned to attention throughout his treatise, a focus that Abbott shared, as evidenced by his choice to pull out the following passage on the dangers of inattention, quoting it in his introduction:

[Inattention] by which the mind, long unaccustomed to have the attention steadily directed to any important object, becomes frivolous and absent, or lost amid its own waking dreams. A mind in this condition becomes incapable of following a train of reasoning, and even of observing facts with accuracy and tracing their relations. Hence nothing is more opposed to the cultivation of intellectual character; and when such a person attempts to reason, or to follow out a course of investigation, he falls into slight and partial views, unsound deductions, and frivolous arguments. This state of mind, therefore, ought to be carefully guarded against in the young.³⁵

The author goes on to point out that memory is largely dependent on attention, and he is careful to emphasize that this is a skill that can and should be developed by practicing it as often as possible. Just as attention forms the basis of memory, for Abercrombie memory forms the basis of all of the thought processes that follow: abstraction, imagination, and reason or judgment. Simply stated, attention and memory are skills vital to the development of those intellectual powers that allow one to be an educated, rational, and even moral citizen.

Abercrombie dwells briefly on the role that pictures have in this process. One develops a storehouse of conceptions—or memories of perceptions—essentially the ability to recall “the impression of an actual scene which has been witnessed, or a person who has been seen, so as to place them, as it were, before the mind, with all the vividness of the original perception.”³⁶ Conceptions allow one to remember the visual world, whether in its natural form or as seen through pictures. An artist is noted for his skill at recombining these conceptions imaginatively to create new art. Implicitly, all interpretations of images are reliant on one’s past experiences with images, and conception is the basis for all art and therefore highly valuable as such. Abercrombie advises his reader to improve their skills at conception by: “1. Occasionally pausing and making an effort to paint distinctly to the mind the scenes described by an author.... [and] 2. Carefully observing scenery, as exhibited in prints and in nature, and impressing its features, both of beauty and grandeur, upon the mind, so as to provide the memory with a store of images, which are to be employed as elements or materials.”³⁷

Abercrombie concludes this section of his philosophy by presenting a series of methods whereby children might improve their memory. He encourages parents or

teachers to “excite constant attention and constant interest” by presenting children with understandable, pleasant material. Parents should explain and illustrate the meaning of words and refrain from mentally wearying children, causing languishment, by requiring them to do too much for too long. Educators should cultivate habits of association by pointing out the relation of facts to each other, then asking children to remember similar facts they’ve already seen. Parents should inspire curiosity in their children on nearly every subject by turning even the most common things to mental improvement, such as animals or common objects found around the house or in nature. Children should be encouraged to verbally communicate their observations and conclusions as often as possible.³⁸

All of these ideas are instrumental to the methodology Abbott adopted in *Rollo Learning to Talk*, published the same year as *Inquiries Concerning the Intellectual Powers*, which was undoubtedly fresh in that author’s mind. He continued to rely on these methods when he published two additional texts, *Learning to Talk* and *Learning to Think*, in 1855 and 1857 respectively. These follow the same format as the first Rollo book by pairing dozens of images with text designed to be used by a mother or older sibling—male or female—to prompt young children to observe, think about, and orally respond to pictures and the conversation that evolves from them.

The first of these publications is remarkably similar to the 1835 book. Attention and memory are the keys to Abbott’s method. He emphasizes the need to give the child plenty of time, first to observe the image, calling attention to certain elements, and then to answer the questions posed. He takes care to present a variety of subject matter, ranging from the appearances and habits of tigers and elephants, to stories about prisoners, military scenes, country life, and going to school. Children are

to be taken through the book slowly, focusing only on a few pages at a time, so that they get the maximum benefit from the book. Their chief function seems to be developing a child's attention, encouraging the perception of details. Again, Abbott is teaching his viewers about codes of representation while attempting to exercise their memories. When introducing a pair of images grouped under the theme "Going to School," the text prompts the child to see varying degrees of speed in pictures; in the first image, the children are walking fast to get to school on time, and in the second, the boy is running (Figures 72-73). The visual is then connected to the child's own experience and physical development, when the parent asks him to jump down and exhibit that he can walk or run as fast as the depicted characters. These same images introduce ideas of invisibility and containment by asking the child to imagine what is not pictured, or that which is inside something else, while simultaneously providing a vocabulary lesson about the meaning of the word satchel, a definition that the child is asked to remember several pages later. Abbott even announces the dangers of misinterpretation in "Fire! Fire!" (Figure 74). At first, the narrator identifies the smoke coming from the building fire and yells at the people standing in front for not running for help, until he realizes that he's really looking at a coal kiln or foundry.³⁹

Learning to Think pushes these processes further. Although this book still addresses pictures, it asks a great many more questions than the previous one, always coaching children to answer, then determine why they think what they do (e.g., based on looking at a picture of a rhinoceros, why it can/can't fly, jump about, walk, defend itself, etc.). While looking at an image of a child rolling a ball (Figure 75), the viewer considers his own experiences and deduces laws of nature through a series of questions about the physics of such things: what shapes do or do not roll, how an

inclined plane affects the need for an introductory push to cause motion, what other things besides a ball might roll. Abbott asks the child to move beyond the picture to a series of abstractions and reasoned judgments. Even a rather innocuous image depicting a girl reading can serve as the impetus for a meandering line of questions, rather like a stream of consciousness, about what the girl is thinking (Figure 76). The statement that she is thinking about her kitten (which is not pictured) leads to the philosophical questions, “Can a kitten think? Can a child think? Can you think?” Afterwards, the viewer is asked to look at the window, shut his eyes, and answer, “Can you think how the window looks while your eyes are shut? Can you think how a ball looks rolling upon the floor? Can you think how the kitten looks, playing with the ball, beyond the margin of the picture? I am glad that you can think.” Here, “think” also seems to be a stand-in for “remember” and “imagine.” Abbott is attempting to get the child to develop his mental picturing abilities, calling on them to formulate conceptions based on past viewing as well as spoken and read words.⁴⁰

In *Gentle Measures*, Abbott finally provides his readers with a codification of this methodology, among other things, and its benefits. He is concerned with developing the physical organs behind mental processes, and he argues that imagination is a way for children to exercise and develop the bodily organs necessary for thinking and other kinds of mental exertions. A developing child, in particular, must continually be prompted to play and imagine in order to keep his vital systems and energy flowing. He lists examples—conversing with dolls, relating impossible fairy stories, or pretending that a switch is a horse he’s riding—of excellent actions for children. And he presents the mother with the simple and easy method of “holding conversations with representations of persons, or even of animals, in the pictures

which she shows him.”⁴¹ These stories can revolve around any number of topics or moral lessons; indeed, earlier in the book Abbott suggests storytelling as the ideal way to discipline children, leading them to make correct decisions in the future after misbehaving. Any inanimate object is grounds for useful personification in this process of didactic storytelling, in order to exercise the child’s mental organs and for more utilitarian purposes.⁴² He gives the example of a father conversing with his son’s new ball, which claims it plans to run away and hide if the boy plays with it near a building, window, holes in the ground, water, etc. Similarly, if a mother accidentally pricks a sick child with a pin while changing it, she can distract it by giving the pin a voice, asking about how it was made and what adventures it might have had in its life. Finally, Abbott points out that any image, “no matter what,” can serve as the basis for a story told to a curious child. His “extreme case” throws a new light on how one might creatively interpret even the noun-pictures in the most humdrum of schoolbooks.

To take an extreme case, suppose the picture is a rude pencil drawing of a post, and nothing besides. You can imagine a boy hidden behind the post, and you can call to him, and finally obtain an answer from him, and have a long talk with him about his play and who he is hiding from, and what other way he has of playing with his friend. Or you can talk with the post directly. Ask him where he came from, who put him in the ground, and what he was put in the ground for, and what kind of tree he was when he was a part of a tree growing in the woods; and, following the subject out, the conversation may be the means of not only amusing the child for the moment, but also of gratifying his curiosity, and imparting a great amount of useful information to him which will materially aid in the development of his powers.⁴³

Although Abbott had much to say in *Gentle Measures* about issues of authority, a mother’s role, punishment, and the moral education of children, issues that have been addressed in other scholarship, he also placed a heavy weight on the

importance of pictures and narrative in the mental development of the young.⁴⁴ Most significantly, he very carefully put these ideas into usage over a span of years, affecting a multigenerational readership and thousands of future art viewers. He was aware of the impact that images seen in youth could have on future viewing and thinking practices, and like Abercrombie, he argued that images should be accumulated during childhood, so that one could rely upon them for interpretation and production of mental pictures in adulthood, whether reading a descriptive passage in a book or viewing a painting composed of other people's conceptions, a Lockean idea at its core.⁴⁵ He returned several times to the idea that images provided the mental furniture and structure that affected one's thinking for the rest of his life. In his conclusion to *Gentle Measures*, Abbott argued that by providing a child with a new image, "you have made a life-long change, if not in the very structure, at least in the permanent furnishing of her mind, and performed a work that can never by any possibility be undone. The images which have been awakened in her mind, the emotions connected with them, and the effect of these images and emotions upon her faculties of imagination and conception, will infuse a life into them which will make her, in respect to this aspect of her spiritual nature, a different being as long as she lives."⁴⁶

Abbott extended his ideas about the production and interpretation of visual images on a more practical level. He produced a series of drawing cards in 1845 and then in 1855 published a so-called drawing book, *The Studio; or, Illustrations of the Theory and Practice of Drawing, for Young Artists at Home*. Ostensibly, in this book Abbott teaches his reader to draw. Yet rather than focusing on the reproduction of lines, shapes, shading, etc., like most drawing books from the nineteenth century

tended to do, it spends much more time describing how to “read” images, interpreting them for emotion, story, character, a sequence of events, etc. More typical images can be found in *Coe’s Drawing Cards* from the 1850s (Figure 77), which begin with extremely simple forms composed mostly of perpendicular lines and, even later in the series, render things as simply as possible and always without context. Abbott does begin by offering practical advice, most of it couched in a series of stories and accompanying illustrations, about sitting upright while drawing and exerting oneself to pay attention to the pictures in the book, which the student should examine and copy in order to learn principles of design. He is very careful to point out that parents need not spend exorbitant amounts of money on drawing supplies, as one only needs a book of pictures, a bit of lead, and some kind of drawing surface in order to succeed. Indeed, he offers protracted stories about two boys, the wealthy Lafayette who spends five dollars on supplies but abandons the project because he doesn’t give it the attention it deserves, and the log-house-dwelling Daniel Hunter who makes his own supplies and copies images from the one picture book his aunt possesses, learning with alacrity.⁴⁷ For an author who generally wrote for a middle-class white readership, this class bias is interesting. He gives preference to the child who pulls himself up by his bootstrap in a manner reminiscent of American mythologies of the self-made American, a theme that became so prominent in Horatio Alger’s *Ragged Dick* and other similar stories.⁴⁸

The book provides a number of woodcut images for the child to copy in order to learn the skills of drawing, and the author introduces some of the foundational principles of artistic design, detailing the workings of perspective and vanishing points. However, he also describes the narratives involved and ascribes conversations

to the participants in the images. Rather than teaching mimicry of nature or prints, Abbott strives to go further in the child's artistic education. Thus, a chapter on "The Human Face" includes an engraving entitled "Picture of the Wounded Boy," which begins by narrating the story of how the boy has cut himself in the thigh and is being tended to by a boy his age, acting the part of a surgeon (Figure 78). He points to facial expressions and how they convey emotion, adding depth to the story, describing how one boy "is faint, perhaps, from the loss of blood, but he still feels the pain, and is striving manfully to bear it. How plainly all this is shown by the few black dots and touches that represent his features!" He also investigates the ways in which gesture add to the emotionalism of a scene by asking his reader to conduct an experiment: use a piece of paper with a hole in it to cover up everything except the face of the mother with clasped hands and then ask a friend to determine the emotional expression based solely on the face.⁴⁹ In a later chapter, Abbott uses "The Summer Morning" to delineate the ways in which an artist might try to represent an idea "*by means of the object or group of objects which he draws,*" then offers the example of this scene representing "rural repose" and points to all of the elements that convey that message: a calm pool, a massive church, tombstones, a shut gate and inn with no traffic, sleeping dogs, a slow-moving shepherd and flock, and an idle pitchfork and spade absent any laborers (Figure 79).⁵⁰ Two lessons later, he takes things one step further, presenting the student with an emblem that moves beyond external nature "taking some *thought, or conception of the mind,* attempts to symbolize and embody it by means of the appropriate natural images." He gives as an example of this kind of poetic genius, an engraving titled "The Evening of Life," which "is meant to symbolize the analogy between the close of human life and the winter of the year" and

was drawn to illustrate a particular poem (Figure 80).⁵¹ Abbott draws his reader's attention to all of the symbolic details used to convey an emblematic idea—the elderly man, the hourglass, a grave, a pilgrim near the end of his journey, a wintery landscape, and the sinking sun—while also pointing out how an image and a poem can work in tandem to portray that idea, rather than just representing a scene or event with a one-to-one relationship.

In the conclusion of *The Studio*, Abbott explains the goal of this drawing book, which is not necessarily to produce little artists, but rather “to show you how to look at pictures, what things to observe in them, and how to understand and appreciate them most fully. Those who shall have read this book attentively will find, I hope, that they will now look at pictures, in some measure at least, with new interest, and will derive greater pleasure from them than heretofore.” He argues that drawing is a way of “training the mind to a higher appreciation of the beauty of forms , and thus increasing our capacity for receiving enjoyment from the landscapes, or groups of figures which we behold in nature, or which we see represented in books of engravings, or in galleries of pictures.”⁵² Abbott sees his role as helping the new generation of Americans to become better informed, cultural citizens, and to achieve this end, he provides a book of practical instructions about how to see stories in images.

Object and Picture Lessons

In some ways, Abbott's works served as precursors to a trend that would sweep through the progressive journals and educational associations a decade later. It takes only a small leap of reasoning to go from an imaginary conversation with a pin to a more rational lesson designed to encourage a child to better know and observe the world around him. In the 1860s, American schools saw a new codification of teaching

principles imported from Europe and derived from the methods of Johann Pestalozzi, an eighteenth-century Swiss theorist emphasizing children's individual sense perception and self-activity. Charles Mayo and his sister Elizabeth revamped his methods in England during the mid-nineteenth century; the former studied with Pestalozzi and brought his methods back to England. Together, the Mayo siblings wrote books describing a regulated system of education. Their publications and ideas became so popular in England that the Home and Colonial Infant School Society was founded in 1836 in order to instruct teachers in the method so that they might apply it in their own classrooms. Although it took several decades to cross the Atlantic and be implemented in full, this system was popularized in America through a number of books, articles, and teachers' meetings, and most particularly by Edwin Austin Sheldon, the superintendent of the Oswego Board of Education in New York.⁵³

Known as object teaching, or object lessons, the method relied on the notion that "Text-book and lecture without illustrations frequently fail in giving just and vivid images, and generally fail in awakening that peculiar reverence which may be excited by direct contact with Nature."⁵⁴ In practice, books provided dozens of lesson plans for which the teacher would give each student or group of students an object, whether a natural material like an apple, acorn, or piece of honeycomb, a raw good like glass or leather, or a manufactured object like a key or a chair. The teacher would then task students with minutely describing that object, determining its key properties, whether smooth or rough, transparent or opaque, etc. The goal was to utilize all of the senses, decipher the differences between materials in natural and artificial states, draw abstract conclusions based on particular observations, classify objects and determine points of resemblance, and write up a detailed report of their findings, composing it in

precise language. All of this may seem resoundingly familiar to material culture scholars of today familiar with Prownian method.⁵⁵ However, during the nineteenth-century educational reformers saw object teaching as a radical break with past lesson plans, largely because, at least at first, it was supposed to preempt instruction in spelling, grammar, and the finer points of reading.⁵⁶

In a report on object teaching delivered at the annual meeting of the National Teachers' Association in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, during 1865, S. S. Greene advocated the practice, noting that, "The usual process of teaching children to read...tends to make the direct object of reading the mere utterance of words, and not the awakening of conceptions.... Let any teacher first fill his own mind with a vivid picture of the objects which the words of a single lesson should call up, and then call upon his best class to repeat the language, carefully searching for their ideas, and he will find the deficiency in actual conception most astonishing" In contrast, "object teaching" was "that which follows Nature's order—the thing, the conception, the word; so that when this order is reversed,—the word, the conception, the thing,—the chain of connection shall not be broken."⁵⁷ Warren Burton even went so far as to argue that close encounters with such objects would benefit America's future commercial progress, stating, "it would be utterly impossible for manufacturer or trader to impose an inferior production on the purchaser."⁵⁸

This practice affected the way students were taught to encounter not only objects, but pictures themselves, both because they had been trained to exercise their skills of observation, description, and analysis, and because most advocates of object teaching included narrative prints in their lesson plans as objects worthy of direct and close study and analysis. Although Elizabeth Mayo and others originally saw this

practice as counterproductive, arguing that only direct contact with objects could advance the method, others quickly abandoned this ideal. Part of this shift might revolve around the impracticality or expense of obtaining raw materials to pass around the classroom and store when not in use. In *A Manual of Elementary Instruction*, E. A. Sheldon introduces a number of “picture lessons” treating specific lithographs, although in an annual report to the Oswego Board of Education, Sheldon claimed that though specific pictures were made for object teaching, any picture could be viewed with the method, such as popular lithographs.⁵⁹ The lesson plan, or sketch, on a picture entitled “The Blind Girl” details three parts to any lesson given on a picture:

I.—In giving a lesson on a picture, it is necessary first to exercise the perceptive faculties. Let the children note,

1. Objects—whether persons or things.
2. Actions—what each person is doing, &c.

Children to determine the character of the actions delineated.

II.—Then deduce the story from the observations made, in such a manner as will excite interest, and call out sympathy.

III.—Apply the lesson to their own conduct and circumstances.⁶⁰

This and other picture lessons in the book reference a set of lithographs first produced by the Home and Colonial Schools in England (after 1847) and then bound by the American Sunday School Union (before 1853) (Figures 81-82).⁶¹ According to the text accompanying the given example, instructors should prompt children to describe the picture, noting how many persons are drawn, how they are alike or differ, and what they are each doing—in this case, a little girl is leading an older, blind girl over a piece of wood across a stream. Each child should then close his eyes and move about in order to conceive of the nature of blindness, in order to excite feelings of sympathy and compassion, after which they should discuss ways they might help blind people and whom in the picture they might imitate. Leaving aside the possibly patronizing

effects of this particular example, Sheldon's outline nevertheless provides an idealized way of approaching any genre picture, particularly the sentimental scenes of children that were so popular in the press and galleries of the 1860s. In this method, children were supposed to view an image in two stages: 1) perception, through which they should observe and describe what they're seeing, and 2) conception, which involved understanding actions, decoding story, considering sequence, and sympathizing with the depicted characters.⁶² This is similar to the theories advocated by Abercrombie three decades earlier, but with more emphasis on the practical application of that process to particular objects and images and the moral implications it could have.

The ultimate aim of this example and the other picture lessons revolved around the improvement of a child's moral understanding. The authors designed the lesson "to awaken the moral sense; to lead the child to distinguish right from wrong; to make *moral impressions*, thus preparing for religious impressions." It joined other lessons that included arranging a number of objects to learn the value of order over disarray, and discussing the kinds of behavior appropriate to different venues, including the schoolroom, the playground, home, church, and the streets.⁶³

Most importantly, this kind of instruction provided another venue in which children would learn to *talk* about images, as the lessons were plotted in a dialogic fashion, with teachers instructed to prompt students to make their own observations so as to come to particular conclusions. In this system, images became something to be described, discussed, compared to one's own life, questioned, and moralized. For another image, "Saturday Night," the text instructed the teacher to ask children about the people they see in the picture, their identities within the family circle, what they are doing, the care and emotions present within the scene, and why such activities

occur on a Saturday night, and not a Sunday. The author couches several moral lessons in the dialogue: one should treat babies and children kindly, the room shouldn't be made untidy, and one should love one's parents.⁶⁴

Fun and Games

On top of the educational and wholesome lessons delivered with their daily schoolwork, children growing up in the latter half of the nineteenth century found another realm in which to explore the meanings, interpretations, and narratives of pictures: that of the popular amusement. Particularly after 1860, a proliferation of games, puzzles, and toys were manufactured or published and sold to coax children into interacting with images. These included basic toys designed to point out the malleability and humor that could be derived from manipulating images, such as the *Picture Pocket Gallery, Comprising 1000 Specimens of the Fine Art*, which allowed a child to flip portions of pictures separately, combining the “correct” images in dozens of bizarre and amusing ways (Figure 83-84). Other toymakers designed objects to facilitate the ordering of images in disarray, like dissected pictures (Figure 85). Magazines published to appeal to young children nearly always included an amusements page, filled with puzzles, charades, and games. Among these, *The Little Corporal*, published between 1865 and 1875, offered a feature remarkable not so much for the quality of its imagery as much as for the novelty of its approach. The magazine treated readers to one or two appearances of “A Picture Story” each month, which consisted of nine sequential images arranged in a grid, each composed of silhouettes and a few sketchy lines (Figure 86). The object was for the reader to compose his own story to explain the occurrences, whether written or merely on the fly, with a sort of solution to appear in the next month's issue, written out in the form

of a small, admittedly rather melodramatic narrative. The feature offered children the opportunity to allow themselves to freely imagine the linkages between panels while at the same time constricting them with a set of learned codes drawn from popular tales, literature, and experiences. For instance, the March 1868 entry and its subsequent “answer” depicts an encounter between two children, a bear, and a gun-wielding adult, which follows the formula set up by tall tales and tough stories about imagination running wild: exaggerating a threat to inspire terror, only to wind up with a humorous twist, reducing the threat to nothing. The month between puzzle and solution provided opportunity for the reader to elaborate on a story as much as he might like, even though the answer set up expectations of being “right” or “wrong” that might not otherwise exist in the interpretation of a narrative image.⁶⁵

A similar tension between “right” and “wrong” narrative interpretations existed in the playing of “Cartoons.” Consider a printed letter from Mr. G. B. Bartlett, published in the “Our Letter Box” section of *Our Young Folks: An Illustrated Magazine for Boys and Girls* (Figure 87). The game began when one player sketched out an illustration of a popular saying or proverb, wrote the “correct” answer at the bottom of the sheet and folded it over, then passed the image around the room, allowing each player to arrive at his own answer and write it in concealment, before all were revealed “with much amusement and instruction to them all.” The game of wit revolved around the abilities of each individual to interpret the narrative inherent in visual imagery through the decipherment of clues included therein, and naturally depended also upon the knowledge and drawing skill of the players involved.⁶⁶

Perhaps the most ubiquitous of these types of puzzles, popular throughout the nineteenth century, was the rebus, which substituted pictorial elements for phrases,

words, or syllables. These ranged from the early, popular hieroglyphic Bibles designed to appeal to children by triggering memorization of familiar verses; to the puzzles found in popular magazines that recollected a simple proverb, such as throwing pearls before swine; to rebuses that concealed an incredibly complicated, long message of nationalistic fervor (Figures 88-90). In the illustrated charades, published in *The Riverside Magazine for Young People* during 1867, both puzzle and solution are delivered in the form of highly developed genre scenes awaiting the reader's interpretation. Such meaning-making is dependent on knowledge of popular culture, but first and foremost requires the viewer's ability to delve to the heart of the scene at hand, picking out the salient details that summarize the complex image given for analysis. In April of 1867, the image representing the first syllable heralds a play on words, as the artist presents a scene of a boy and girl striding arm in arm across a fenced field. This is a beau with a bow, with a rainbow arching in the background; the second portrays a group of boys huddled around a peep show on the street. The answer, found in the May issue: Bo Peep (Figures 91-92).⁶⁷

In each case, these nineteenth-century picture books, games, and puzzles worked to prompt young viewers and readers to look first at a picture with an eye towards interpreting the narrative impulse behind it, providing them with recommended methods and recognized formulae. Educational theorists saw the very process of divining stories from images, of imposing narrative order on seeming chaos, as a way of building one's cognitive faculties, strengthening memory and morality, and preparing for future encounters with other kinds of art. The *Illuminated Household Stories for Little Folks* series laments "the assumption that indifferent pictures are good enough to give first impressions of Art to Children," instead wishing

to expose them to “the exquisite specimens of high Pictorial Art, from which Children may derive those correct ideas that will mature into the beautiful and grand.”⁶⁸ It was a well-reported fact that picture books played a key role in a child’s artistic and mental development. As *The Family Christian Almanac* stated in 1869, “Consider what picture-books are to a child; not only culture, nutriment, play, but medicine, comfort, rest; nothing enters so completely and entirely into child-life. They are repeated, quoted, dramatized, remembered. What sense and sensibility, spice and shortness are required to write one! I had rather be the author of a lively and wholesome picture-book, than to be Hume or Smollet. Let not picture-book makers undervalue their mission.”⁶⁹

Of Bears and Beanstalks

People so often discussed and sentimentalized picture books, particularly during the 1860s, that they showed up as references fairly often in paintings destined for the walls of upper-class homes and exhibition galleries open to the public. Such representations afforded artists, many of whom had children and thus might have been familiar with the ways these books were valued and recommended by the nurture literature of the time, the opportunity to investigate the operation of the storytelling process and the ways that pictures, books, and picture books might dwell at the center of social, textual, and oral dynamics within the family and American society.

During 1858, Lilly Martin Spencer turned her brush to the exploration of family dynamics and storytelling in her painting, *Fi! Fo! Fum!* (Figure 1). Here a family huddles closely together in the evening in a cozy, lamp-lit room for that time-honored tradition, the nightly story. Father gathers his two daughters to his sides as he dramatically narrates a tale for them, while mother warmly gazes at the grouping in

approval. The three central figures provide an interesting glimpse of storytelling in action. One girl clutches at her father's neckwear, bracing herself for the pivotal moment she is envisioning beyond the picture plane. She shares her perspective with her father, who gazes at us with dramatically wide-open eyes. The elder daughter stares up at her father, open-mouthed and perhaps more interested in the mechanics of storytelling and her idea of him as the beloved storyteller. That storyteller himself is heavily focused on the tale he tells: "Fi! Fo! Fum! I smell the blood of an Englishman!" The refrain of the popular fairy tale Jack and the Beanstalk echoes from the title of the painting, drawing the viewer into the circle of family life. He too is in-the-know about the story being told. Through his memory and his internal verbalization of the sounds issuing from the father's lips, the viewer becomes a part of the family grouping and a participant in the depicted process. Sound is key in this painting. The title evokes those breathy, nonsensical syllables that are nothing but sound, which both identify the story being told and indicate the orality of the moment on view. *Fi! Fo! Fum!* offers viewers the opportunity to think about ways in which narrative works, visually, orally, and textually.

The painting is unusual in that Spencer has portrayed the mother, a self-portrait, as an observer who peeks over her husband's shoulder—modeled after the artist's own husband—while he interacts with the children in an intimate, domestic setting. Still, she retains authorship of the story; as the observer and creator of the scene, she has figuratively placed the words in the husband's mouth. The painting also nods to the unorthodox domestic situation that Spencer and her husband Benjamin enjoyed. After their marriage in Ohio in 1844, she and Benjamin moved to New York with their two children so that she could pursue her artistic dreams. She

found the urban art world was difficult for a woman artist, and she spent most of her time working on paintings sold for engraving to the American Art Union and then the Cosmopolitan Art Association, organizations that offered subscriptions and prints to a largely female audience. Her husband remained at home to tend to their many children, while simultaneously assisting her with her art and operating as her business agent. In a letter to her mother, she recalled the close familial situation they shared, describing their evenings at home: “Myself at my pictures or sewing, and Ben reading loud, history or sketching or helping me at some sewing.”⁷⁰

Art historians have frequently noted Spencer’s paintings for the particular way in which her characters interact with viewers, drawing them into the action in a form of egalitarian direct address similar to social practices like small talk, attempting to make the reader identify or sympathize with the depicted character, as in *Kiss Me and You’ll Kiss the ‘Lasses* (Figure 93).⁷¹ However, in *Fi! Fo! Fum!*, something quite different is going on. Father and child still gaze fixedly out of the picture plane towards the viewer, allowing eye contact, yet this look is closer to what Garrett Stewart has termed a look of “textual awareness” as the “the listening figure...looks outward into museum space even while protected by the absorptive logic of her concentration, focused either on the images summoned by recited words or on associated fantasies they may precipitate.”⁷² At what does the younger child look with such apprehension, if not an imagined vision of the story being told? The picture plane forms a kind of screen, allowing for the formation of a mental image, a visualization exercise shared by both the participants in the painted action and the viewer standing before the canvas. As the writings of Abercrombie and Abbott demonstrate, during the nineteenth century both writers and artists dwelt on the

process by which the mind processed speech or the written word into imagery. One writer, in his tract “The Philosophy of Fiction,” explains that “the merit of a narrator consists in the vividness with which he can bring scenes and situations before the mind’s eye” so that the listener’s imagination could picture narrative, a process that he likens to nature’s “own ingenious and curious economy of dreams.”⁷³

Artists too were interested in the ways in which mental images from one’s imagination might be rendered physical. An 1840s version of *Jack and the Beanstalk* offers an interesting rendition of the story that explores the print trade and the process by which books and their illustrations are made.⁷⁴ The text describes Jack’s adventures as he climbs the stalk and finds, not a giant, but rather a huge papermaking operation, a type foundry, and the printing of pages from set type: the long story provides a step-by-step list of how books are made and ends with Jack’s decision to learn how to read. This book, an encomium for the printing trade produced by printers, was republished only three years later, and the new edition added a number of engraved prints that, rather than illustrating the text, serve to provide their own, parallel version of this how-to tale, focusing instead on the relationship between text, mental visualization, and physically rendered artwork. Thus, for one frontispiece (Figure 94) the artist has depicted a man reading while a woman paints or draws a landscape beside him, and illustration is cast as a process of translation through the echoes in their poses and the circular composition that moves from the man’s book to the woman’s hand poised over a blank sheet of paper, up to a completed image, and back around to the man’s head and reading eyes. Another frontispiece (Figure 95) portrays two children reading together, while above them a larger landscape unfolds, displayed by the gesturing hand of a male figure. Perhaps this too represents the

mental visualization that occurs while reading or hearing a story, much like Spencer's own painting, *Reading the Legend*, in which a fantastical Gothic ruin arises behind the woman who gazes dreamily upward while her beau reads to her from an unidentified novel (Figure 96). Unlike these works, however, Spencer's *Fi! Fo! Fum!* brings the visualization into the viewer's space.

In this case, a large part of that projected mental picture derives from the viewer's experience of the tale being told: a story recalled from memory, built from the mental furniture that storybooks like those of Abbott would have constructed in viewers' young minds. Jack and the Beanstalk was one of the more popular stories published and republished during the middle decades of the nineteenth century, as printing and paper technology grew by leaps and bounds and a larger variety of books hit the market, available to a wider range of readers. Earlier critiques of the corrupting influence of fantastic fairy tales generally gave way to the opinion that these appropriate tales taught valuable lessons and provided a venue—even more necessary “in an utilitarian age,” as one author put it—as “nursery of fancy.” Among these, the beanstalk came to signify this world of fantasy in microcosm, such that an 1853 song, “Once upon a Time,” could nostalgically evoke youthful imaginings simply by stating, “We do not climb up beanstalks now...Reality has chased Romance.”⁷⁵

Published offerings ranged from the most famous, George Cruikshank's elaborately engraved 1854 *The History of Jack and the Beanstalk*, which sold for one shilling, to the Little Folks series of small, chapbook-like pamphlets, notable for their yellow paper covers and simply engraved illustrations selling at three cents apiece. Enthusiasts could even buy a moveable version of the tale with tabs that allowed young readers to manipulate the illustrated characters, making heads nod and arms

wave. In each case, the story was consistent: a young, lazy boy defies his long-suffering mother, trades her precious cow to a butcher for a sack of beans, climbs the beanstalk and takes revenge upon the man-eating giant that killed his father by stealing a succession of objects, and leads the giant to fall to his death. Although the illustrations differed in style and design, they almost invariably focused on similar subject matter, with one scene in particular recurring: the barbarically hirsute giant slumbers, gesticulates, or capers about while a tiny Jack cowers in hiding or sneaks off with the giant's belongings (Figures 97-99). It is not difficult to imagine that it is this moment of dramatic tension and potential discovery that draws forth the wide eyes and fearful or awed gazes in Spencer's painting, especially considering the superficial resemblance between the giant and the bearded father Benjamin, who mouths his words, and the beanstalk-like twining, organic curvature of the stand that edges the painting on the right.

In 1857, *Putnam's Monthly Magazine* published a rhapsodic article concerning the fairy tale that evoked a linkage between stories and childhood books, those treasured material objects enshrined in memory—and their illustrations. The author enumerated “the fairy bean-stalk” and “Jack the Giant Killer” and remarked, “how curiously are associated [with these] in our minds the sources whence we first drew the ideas of their beauty and variety! Yes, the well-thumbed, dog's-eared, twopenny story-book of old days—with its flaring red, blue, or yellow wrapper, and its outrageous wood-cuts” that “the mind's eye can only see...as through a glass.”⁷⁶ As evidence that the tiny, fragile books held lasting emotional value for their owners, we can point to the numbers of them that survive in library collections, usually with carefully penciled inscriptions identifying their owners. For instance, *The Girl's*

Pleasure Book at Princeton library is dedicated to “Lily Hathaway, from Mary, San Lorenzo, Calif.” and includes a later inscription, “for Elizabeth Jean...from Aunt Lily. I had these stories read to me,” showcasing a legacy of gift giving and relationships articulated through tales that would serve as a basis for shared experiences.⁷⁷

Seymour Joseph Guy exemplifies this connection between the book as object and the intimate familial relationships that it can foster in his 1870 painting, *The Story of Golden Locks* (Figure 100).⁷⁸ In a tattered attic bedroom, an adolescent girl perches on the edge of her brothers’ bed as she reads to them from a beloved picture book, her hand upraised as she reaches the climax of the story. She is brightly lit, and the pure yellowish white of her innocently childish nightgown contrasts heavily with the shadow she casts, which looms ominously over the wide-eyed, anxiety-ridden faces of her younger brothers. However, it is the book itself that is located at the center of the painting, mediating the space between the girl and her brothers, and viewed two-dimensionally, the dark ghostly shadow rises from its pages, broadening as it spreads out on the wall. Where every other object in the painting is rendered with meticulous detail but with no indication of the artist’s hand in the careful brushwork, in the pages of the book, the lines are individually rendered in sharp delineation, and the picture is precisely tilted up so as to be visible to the viewer. This is no anonymous book with blurred writing, but is instead readily identifiable; the colored illustration derives from “The Story of the Three Bears,” as engraved by the Englishmen John Absolon and Harrison Weir for the 1850 edition of *A Treasury of Pleasure Books for Young Children* (Figures 101-102) and reprinted dozens of times during that decade, both in London and in America, by various publishers, with attribution or without, by itself and in different collections (Figures 103-105).⁷⁹

Guy was born and trained in England under the portrait artist Ambrose Jerome, and at the age of 30 he emigrated to America and settled in New York City, where he embarked upon a successful career as a portraitist and genre painter who specialized in depicting middle and upper-class children, often portrayed in anecdotal scenes, a subject that appealed to the Victorian taste for sentiment. This is not his only image representing the family's interaction with a picture book, as evidenced by his undated painting, *Knowledge is Power* (Figure 106), which presents a different view as a mother and child share an encounter with an elaborate, fold-out picture book, this time with its text and images more anonymously obscured. Upon his arrival in America in 1854, he and his wife Anna established a stable family life, and scholars have asserted that those portrayed in *The Story of Golden Locks* might even be his own children, Edith, Charles, and William.⁸⁰ It is possible that the book might have been a treasured, saved object, as it was first printed twenty years earlier. The engraving illustrates the climactic moment of the text as included in Absolon and Weir's book: after breaking into the house of the three bears and rifling through their belongings while they were out walking in the woods, "little Silver-hair" falls asleep in the bed of the "Little, Small, Wee Bear," where the bear finds her. Upon hearing his shrill voice, she awakens with a start, runs to the window, and jumps out, fleeing into the wood. It is the moment that she faces her guilt and flees from its consequences, while the three bears look after her with indignation.

Significantly, the text possesses a rhythm and a repetition that lends itself well to memorization and oral reading, with cues for the reader signifying both volume and tone (Figure 107). The size and vocal tenor of the Bear is indicated through font size and descriptive adjectives.⁸¹ It is not the "rough, gruff voice of the Great, Huge

Bear,” likened to the “roaring of wind and the rumbling of thunder,” but the “so sharp, and so shrill” voice of the “Little, Small, Wee Bear” that awakens Silver-hair. Of course, we cannot know the exact ephemeral experiences or memories of the original viewers of this painting, yet the work portrays a common scene during the mid-nineteenth century, when authors of advice literature, columnists in literary magazines, and even writers for health journals uniformly recommended reading aloud as an activity to ensure familial bonding and children’s mental and emotional health. As early as 1829, Maria Elizabeth Budden recommended reading aloud “as giving the united assistance of the eye and the ear to the memory.” She forecast it as the way to “make a happy home” since keeping young boys at home to engage in a “reading society” with the family could prevent a descent into vice. Writers described family reading as a way to induce children to love reading and learning. They even touted it as an exercise program to increase the breath and reduce hoarseness of voice.⁸²

Elocution lessons and pages detailing the proper articulation and diction of words filled schoolbooks, and teachers regularly tasked children with memorizing and reciting passages from their primers and readers. For children, reading often meant speaking, memorizing, and listening. Despite the silence of paint on a canvas, then, Guy brings this process to the viewer’s attention through the activity he showcases and the mental echoes that follow the centralized book.

Thus, the painting brings together two different stories: 1) the interaction between the young girl and her siblings, and their reactions to her performance, and 2) the remembered and reconstructed version of the story deriving from the book so specifically depicted, with its oral resonances. The imagined story is projected onto multiple “screens” and takes place on a number of levels within the work. The page of

the book provides one illustration that carries with it the implication of all that came before. As in Spencer's *Fi! Fo! Fum!*, the staring eyes of the children focus toward the viewer, where the child's imagined image and the viewer's own mental image converge in the space outside the painting. Viewer and character are linked in that they share the activity of imagining the story, its outcome, and the lessons involved.

The girl's shadow, which rises in large form on the wall, might be seen as figuring the imagination itself, attempting to represent the unrepresentable. Or, more simply, it might call to mind the storytelling capacity of shadows, based on a popular trend that blossomed in America in 1859 with the importation and republication of Henry Bursill's *Hand Shadows to Be Thrown upon the Wall*, images that could be paired performatively with stories, as in the later 1863 *Hand Shadow Stories*.⁸³ Its silhouette-like appearance references that long tradition as well, which had largely fallen out of fashion as a serious avenue for portraiture by the 1850s, although it would have been very familiar to children. For one thing, silhouettes formed the basis of a game known as shadow buff, a game illustrated in a story published in *Riverside Magazine for Young People* in January 1867 (Figure 108), in which one child would be seated upon a stool in front of a white sheet hung from the ceiling, while someone would position a candle or lantern behind her. Other children would then take turns passing between the candle and her back, distorting themselves as much as possible to render themselves unrecognizable, while she watches their shadows upon the sheet and tries to identify them. Here the children are attempting to disguise themselves, and yet the need for contortions points to the popular association of one's silhouette with one's identity, both outer and inner.⁸⁴ Scholars have done a great deal of work on such issues with regard to the physiognomical investigations of Johann Kaspar

Lavater, and although his theories reached their greatest popularity in America earlier in the century, they were nonetheless still firmly within the visual lexicon of American viewers. Just the year before the completion of Guy's *Story of Goldenlocks*, the *Riverside Magazine* published an article entitled "How to Cut Out Likenesses," which provided children with practical instructions to allow them to take silhouettes of their friends using a square of clear glass and oiled paper, and referenced to Lavater's belief that one could tell character through facial features. The article included an image taken from the physiognomist's book, a silhouette showing a mother reading from a book while her daughter sits before her and listens (Figure 109), and it concludes by quoting Lavater on these individuals, citing the calmness, endurance, and rectitude of the mother and the child's delicacy of mind, clearness of ideas, and ability to express herself. W. Newman's *Moveable Shadows for the People* (1859) validates this notion that one's shadow was seen to represent one's true self, even more so than one's physical appearance. When the reader pulled on the tabs attached to each represented character type in this moveable book, the body slipped to the side, revealing the shadow's truth, turning a chortling card player into a jagged-tooth, vicious shark (Figure 110). Thus, the girl's shadow cast upon the attic wall also becomes a multivalent screen, filled with different meanings for the discerning viewer—imagination or anxiety, the key to true identity or a mysterious distortion.⁸⁵

The doll that rests in a cigar-box bed on the chair in the right foreground presents another possible avenue for storytelling. David Lubin has argued that the doll has been cast aside, abandoned on the periphery of the image as the girl moves into womanhood.⁸⁶ But there is another way to understand it. The doll is carefully positioned so that she rests in bed, much like the two boys, facing towards the reader

and providing another audience as she is read to by her “little mother,” as girls with dolls were frequently called in popular stories after the Civil War, when dolls became both more common and less expensive. Both the brothers and the doll provide the opportunity for the girl to imitate her elders, playing at motherhood to prepare her for her future role as Abbott’s mother who will read to her own children. However, here there is a macabre twist, as the girl attempts to titillate and frighten the children. One might also consider the details of the story she recounts.

During 1867, the editor of the children’s magazine *The Little Corporal*, Alfred L. Sewell, wrote and published an article announcing that he had purchased for \$1000 the painting *Red Ridinghood and the Wolf*, from the artist William Holbrook Beard (Figure 111). He intended to produce from it a number of chromolithographs to be sold to the readership to boost subscriptions. Over the next months, a number of features appeared in the magazine circulating around the Red Ridinghood story, including a poem, an account of the process of chromolithography, and a feature article, entitled “Playing Red Ridinghood.”⁸⁷ Published with an illustration in conjunction with another announcement of the painting, the story details the decision of two little girls to create a tableau involving a pet fox, dressed in a doll’s nightgown, and the red-hooded doll, Minnie, which was enacted for company (Figure 112). This story of doll play, while a fictionalized version that may reflect expectations rather than actual childhood behaviors, nevertheless reveals another method by which children might visualize the stories that they heard. The doll in *The Story of Golden Locks* might then be viewed as another allusion to the action of the tale being told, for the interloping girl rises from a bed that doesn’t quite fit her body, as the doll’s body strains the confines of the cigar box.

Later in his career, Guy painted another version of this picture, *Bedtime Story* (Figure 113), which was exhibited at the 1879 NAD exhibition and purchased by a famous patron of American art and one of Guy's firmest supporters, Thomas B. Clarke.⁸⁸ In many respects, *Bedtime Story* shares its composition and subject matter with the earlier work, which might have remained in the artist's possession—no provenance records exist prior to the 1970s for *The Story of Golden Locks*. However, many of the aspects that so firmly highlight the particular story and book, which might have had a special significance for its original audience, as well as the tense relationship between the enigmatic little girl and her brothers, have vanished. The lighting in *Bedtime Story* is more uniform, such that the only shadow helps to obscure the illustration in the picture book, which is less clearly delineated and tilted further away from the viewer. Guy includes an entirely different little girl, this time dressed fashionably in street dress and boots, such that an *Art Journal* reviewer might claim, "The nice, bright girl, in her brown frock and neat hair, is just such a child as one sees and likes to see every day, and nobody fond of children can help sympathising with and loving the wide-eyed little ones, who listen eagerly to the tale which is being told."⁸⁹ The children inhabit a safer, more comfortably upper-class room, and much of the anxiety has disappeared from their faces.

For nineteenth-century mothers and teachers, a focus on fairy tales and storytelling was more than simply an outlet for sentimental, nostalgic longing for the delights of childish imaginings. The *American Annals of Education* published a series of articles detailing the usefulness of storytelling in schools, advocating that all district school teachers should get into the habit of storytelling, as it was a method for "developing the mind and heart by a natural and rational method of instruction."⁹⁰

Teachers and students prized stories in education both for the lessons one could learn from their content and because the format in itself was valued as a way to engage and develop the mind. While representing their families in these paintings, Guy and Spencer have explored the very nature of imagination and representation, exercising their own roles as storytellers to depict the interstices between word and image and bridging the barrier between the characters on the canvases and the viewers in front of them.

ENDNOTES

¹ Burton, *The District School as It Was*, 17.

² Fowler, *Fowler on Memory*, 16.

³ Burton, *The District School as It Was*, 14.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 12-14.

⁵ Patricia Crain, *The Story of A: The Alphabetization of America from "The New England Primer" to "The Scarlet Letter"* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 91.

⁶ Burton, *The District School as It Was*, 5-6.

⁷ Back cover advertisement, *Jack and the Bean-Stalk: Illuminated with Ten Pictures. Hewet's Illuminated Household Stories, for Little Folks, with Illustrations by W. H. Thwaites. Engraved by the Best Artists* (New York: Loomis & Co., 1855).

⁸ Both the American Tract Society and the American Sunday School Union sponsored a vast array of publications during their reign. The American Antiquarian Society houses a beautiful sampling of them, a few of which include: *The Children's Picture Book* (Boston: American Tract Society, 1856); *A Pretty Picture Book* (New York: New-York Religious Tract Society, [not after 1825]); Jane S. Warren, *Pictures and Lessons for Little Readers* (Boston: American Tract Society, [1863-68]); *A Picture Book for Little Boys and Girls* (Philadelphia: American Sunday-School Union, [1832]); *Common Sights in Town and Country. Valuable Books for Children and Youth with Fine Plates and Engravings in Large Varieties* (Philadelphia: American Sunday-School Union, [1851]); *Picture Stories for Girls* (Philadelphia: American Sunday-School Union, 1853); *Country Sights for City Eyes* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1858); *The Book of One Hundred Pictures* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1861); and *The Second Book of 100 Pictures* (Philadelphia: American Sunday-School Union, 1861).

⁹ Illustration is of course far more complicated in its mental operations and the relationships that develop between text and image, than the following comparison

implies, and I have no wish to do it an injustice. For a theoretical introduction to the operations of illustrations, see W. J. T. Mitchell, "Word and Image," in *Critical Terms for Art History*, edited by Robert Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). A large volume of work has been written about the relationship between text and image, and between author, illustrator, and viewer. Just a few examples are Stephen C. Behrendt, "Sibling Rivalries: Author and Artist in the Earlier Illustrated Book," *Word and Image* 13, no. 1 (1997): 23-42; Cynthia Patterson, "'Illustration of a Picture': Nineteenth-Century Writers and the Philadelphia Pictorials," *American Periodicals* 19, no. 2 (2009): 136-164; and Richard M. Berrong, "When Art and Literature Unite: Illustrations that Create a New Art Form," *Word and Image* 23, no. 3 (2007): 362-375.

¹⁰ Fowler, *Fowler on Memory*, 7.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹² Crain, *The Story of A*, 93.

¹³ *The National Pictorial Primer; Designed for the Use of Schools and Families. Embellished with More than One Hundred and Fifty Fine Engravings* (New York: George F. Cooleage & Brother, ca. 1846).

¹⁴ Elizabeth Oram, *Pictorial Definer. Part II. With Relative and Associated Words* (New York: J. C. Riker, 1845), iv.

¹⁵ T. H. Gallaudet, *The Child's Picture Defining and Reading Book* (Hartford: H. & F. J. Huntington, 1830), iv. For a much more thorough discussion of the relationship between the pictorial and deafness, see Nicholas Mirzoeff, *Silent Poetry: Deafness, Sign, and Visual Culture in Modern France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

¹⁶ Crain, *The Story of A*. Crain treats alphabet arrays and noun pictures in great and convincing detail.

¹⁷ *The National Pictorial Primer*, 29.

¹⁸ In the first year, the ASSU printed 42,000 reward books, 51,000 tracts, 4,000 catechisms, 10,000 spelling books, 11,000 alphabetical cards, and 726,000 tickets (rewards for biblical recitation). Circulation would reach huge numbers. During 1850, they printed 80,000 copies of the *Tract Primer* and 320,000 of the *Almanac* alone. Morgan, *Protestants and Pictures*, 202-210.

¹⁹ For an excellent discussion of the use of visual images by the American Sunday School Union and the American Tract Society, see Morgan, *Protestants and Pictures*, especially 13-39. See also Jennifer A. Perry, “*Milk for Babes and Meat for Men*”: *The Children’s Books of the American Sunday-School Union, 1825-1865* (master’s thesis, University of Delaware, 1995); and David Paul Nord, *Faith in Reading: Religious Publishing and the Birth of Mass Media in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). Back cover, *Picture Lessons, Illustrating Moral Truth. For the Use of Infant-Schools, Nurseries, Sunday-Schools, & Family Circles* (Philadelphia: American Sunday-School Union, ca. 1850).

²⁰ *The Book of One Hundred Pictures*.

²¹ *Picture Stories for Girls*, 49-53; and *The Book of One Hundred Pictures*.

²² Quoted and discussed in Morgan, *Protestants and Pictures*, 237-240.

²³ Quoted in John B. Boles, “Jacob Abbott and the Rollo Books: New England Culture for Children,” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 6, no. 3 (1973): 511.

²⁴ Beecher wrote, “In matters pertaining to the education of their children, in the selection and support of a clergyman, in all benevolent enterprises, and in all questions relating to morals and manners, they have a superior influence.” Beecher, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy*, 9. Interestingly, as I discuss later in this chapter, Jacob Abbott involved himself thoroughly in the education of children, both in the various schools he ran and in the home. Perhaps he addresses his book to a “mother” out of a conventional understanding of how most of his customers operated, less than as a symptom of his own beliefs about gendered roles in childhood education.

²⁵ Jacob Abbott, *Rollo Learning to Talk*. In *The Rollo Series* (Philadelphia: Hogan & Thompson, 1850), 8.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 10-13.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 14, 49, 61, 84, 70, 34, 18.

²⁸ I borrow this terminology from Mieke Bal, who describes “telling objects” as particularly significant objects that must signify through common codes and conventions of meaning-making that both producer and reader understand. She asks, “Can things be, or tell, stories?” Mieke Bal, “Telling Objects: A Narrative Perspective on Collection,” in John Elsner and Roger Cardinal, eds., *The Cultures of Collecting* (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), 97-115.

²⁹ “Editor’s Book Table,” *Lady’s Book* (Nov. 1839), 239.

³⁰ For biographical details on Abbott, see Allen Johnson, ed., “Abbott, Jacob,” in *Dictionary of American Biography*, vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1928), 21-22; and John A. Garraty and Mark C. Carnes, eds., “Abbott, Jacob,” in *American National Biography*, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 27-28. “The Rollo Books,” *Christian Examiner and General Review* 27, no. 1 (Sept. 1839): 135.

³¹ Boles, “Jacob Abbott and the Rollo Books”; Jani L. Berry, “Discipline and (Dis)order: Paternal Socialization in Jacob Abbott’s Rollo Books,” *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (1993): 100-105; Mary E. Quinlivan, “Race Relations in the Antebellum Children’s Literature of Jacob Abbott,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 16, no. 1 (1982): 27-36; William W. Lawrence, “Rollo and His Uncle George,” *New England Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (1945): 291-302; Lorinda B. Cohoon, “Jacob Abbott’s ‘Jonas Books’ and the Construction of an 1840s Middle-Class Boyhood,” *Dime Novel Roundup* 70 (2001): 43-56; and Jeannette Barnes Lessels, “Overcoming Racism in Jacob Abbott’s Stories of Rainbow and Lucky in Antebellum America,” in *Enterprising Youth: Social Values and Acculturation in Nineteenth-Century American Children’s Literature*, edited by Monika Elbert (New York: Routledge, 2008), 83-96.

³² There is a very large body of literature dealing with changing attitudes towards children in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The following represent only a few useful sources: Karin Calvert, *Children in the House: The Material Culture of Early Childhood, 1600-1900* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992); Claire Perry, *Young America: Childhood in 19th-Century Art and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); Philip J. Greven, Jr., ed., *Child-Rearing Concepts: Historical Sources, 1628-1861* (Itasca, Ill.: F. E. Peacock Publishers, Inc., 1973); Mary Lynn Stevens Heininger, *A Century of Childhood, 1820-1920* (Rochester, NY: Margaret Woodbury Strong Museum, 1984); Mary P. Ryan, *The Empire of the Mother: American Writing About Domesticity, 1830-1860* (New York: Haworth, 1982); Sarah Anne Carter, “Object Lessons in American Culture” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2010), 52-60; Anne Scott MacLeod, *A Moral Tale: Children’s Fiction and American Culture, 1820-1860* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1975); and Amy Weinstein, *Once Upon a Time: Illustrations from Fairytales, Fables, Primers, Pop-Ups, and Other Children’s Books* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005). Famous examples of “nurture” literature include, Lydia M. Child, *The Mother’s Book* (Boston: Carter and Hendee, 1831); John Abbott, *The Mother at Home; or, the Principles of Maternal Duty Familiarly Illustrated* (New York: American Tract Society, 1833); and Beecher, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy*.

³³ For a few examples of Abbott's pedagogical literature, see *The Lectures Delivered Before the American Institute of Instruction, at Providence, (R.I.) August, 1840; Including the Journal of the Proceedings, and a List of Officers. Published under the Director of the Board of Censors* (Boston: William D. Ticknor, 1841); Jacob Abbott, "Art. III.—Advantages of Discerning Peculiarities of Character in Pupils, and of Adapting One's Self to Them," *American Annals of Education* 9 (Jan. 1839): 23; Jacob Abbott, "The Duties of Parents, in Regard to the Schools Where Their Children Are," *The District School Journal of the State of New York* 1, no. 2 (June 1, 1840): 15; and Jacob Abbott, "Punishments," *The Friend; a Religious and Literary Journal* 14, no. 42 (July 17, 1841): 331. For an entertaining anecdotal account of Abbott's life and attitudes towards children, including the Farmington voluntary school, see his son's short biography of the author, Lyman Abbott, "Jacob Abbott, Friend of Children," in *Silhouettes of My Contemporaries* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1922), 332-361.

³⁴ For a detailed analysis of nineteenth-century attitudes towards attention, see Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), especially his first chapter. He discusses the rise of interest in "attention" among scientific psychologists, a problem directly related to the emergence of a world increasingly saturated with sensory input. He describes an "ongoing crisis of attentiveness" as a crucial aspect of modernity, although he focuses largely on discussions of attention in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

³⁵ John Abercrombie, *Inquiries Concerning the Intellectual Powers, and the Investigation of Truth. With Additions and Explanations to Adapt the Work to the Use of Schools and Academies, by Jacob Abbott* (Boston: J. Allen & Co., 1835), 13, 51.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 77.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 99-100. This notion of a storehouse of images likely draws on the theories of John Locke and Scottish common sense philosophies of the mind. Locke famously argued that the mind was a tabula rasa, a white paper void of ideas that was filled by a person's experience. "Within the 'presence-room' of the mind, sensory impressions were stored in the form of images (a notion grounded in the classical notion of the 'ideal system') and sorted into 'simple' or 'complex' ideas. Such ideas were the raw ingredients of thought; compared and combined, they produced more advanced knowledge." Bellion, *Citizen Spectator*, 27-28.

³⁸ Abercrombie, *Inquiries Concerning the Intellectual Powers*, 104-106.

³⁹ Jacob Abbott, *Learning to Talk; or, Entertaining and Instructive Lessons in the Use of Language* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1855).

⁴⁰Idem, *Learning to Think. Consisting of Easy and Entertaining Lessons, Designed to Assist in the First Unfolding of the Reflective and Reasoning Powers of Children* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1856), 13-14.

⁴¹ Idem, *Gentle Measures in the Management and Training of the Young; or, The Principles on Which a Firm Parental Authority May Be Established and Maintained, without Violence or Anger, and the Right Development of the Moral and Mental Capacities Be Promoted by Methods in Harmony with the Structure and the Characteristics of the Juvenile Mind* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1871), 200.

⁴² Perhaps Abbott was basing this suggestion on the “it” narratives popular in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. These were stories told from the perspective of common daily objects, like coins, coats, dogs, watches, and shoes. A great deal of scholarship exists discussing this type of literature, but a good place to start for further information is Mark Blackwell, Ed., *The Secret Life of Things: Animals, Objects, and It-Narratives in Eighteenth-Century England* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 2007).

⁴³ Abbott, *Gentle Measures*, 202.

⁴⁴ Beecher, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy* and Child, *The Mother’s Book*, are two of the more popular examples of this kind of advice literature. For an excellent source analyzing these and other works, see Ryan, *The Empire of the Mother*.

⁴⁵ For more on Locke’s theories of education and childhood development, see John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, edited by John W. and Jean S. Yolton (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Sam Pickering, *John Locke and Children’s Books in Eighteenth-Century England* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981); and Margaret J. M. Ezell, “John Locke’s Images of Childhood: Early Eighteenth Century Response to Some Thoughts Concerning Education,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 17, no. 2 (1983-1984): 139-155.

⁴⁶ Abbott, *Gentle Measures*, 327-328.

⁴⁷ Idem, *The Studio; or, Illustrations of the Theory and Practice of Drawing, for Young Artists at Home* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1855). Although the author lays out his ideas on drawing, narrative, and artistic principles throughout the course of the entire book, Study I (13-16) offers his basic premise. Studies XXII-XXVI tell the story of the rich, city-dwelling Lafayette Livingston, and Studies XXVIII-XXXII focus on Daniel Hunter in his log cabin.

⁴⁸ For more on this theme in Alger's works, see Gary Scharnhorst, *Horatio Alger, Jr.* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980). For a broader scope, see James V. Catano, *Ragged Dicks: Masculinity, Steel, and the Rhetoric of the Self-Made Man* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001).

⁴⁹ Abbott, *The Studio*, 59.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 72-73.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 78-80. The text of the poem reads as follows: "'Tis done! Dread winter spreads his latest glooms,/ And reigns tremendous o'er the conquered year./ How dead the vegetable kingdom lies!/ How dumb the tuneful! Horror wide extends/ His desolate domain. Behold, fond man!/ See here they pictured life; pass some few years,/ Thy flowering spring, thy summer's ardent strength,/ Thy sober autumn fading into age,/ And pale, concluding winter comes at last,/ And shuts the scene."

⁵² *Ibid.*, 159.

⁵³ Carter, *Object Lessons in American Culture*, provides an excellent and detailed history of the development and usage of object teaching, as it moved from Switzerland to England, then to America.

⁵⁴ Quoting Rev. Dr. Hill, in S. S. Greene, *Report on Object Teaching, Made at the Meeting of the National Teachers' Association, Held at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, August, 1865* (Boston: Massachusetts Teachers' Association, 1865), 4.

⁵⁵ For the Prownian method, see Jules Prown, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method," *Winterthur Portfolio* 17, no. 1 (1982): 1-19.

⁵⁶ Some key texts concerning object teaching and lessons on common things are: John Frost, *Lessons on Common Things; for the Use of Schools and Families. On the Basis of Dr. Mayo's Lessons on Objects* (Philadelphia: J. R. Lippincott & Co., 1857); E. A. Sheldon, *Lessons on Objects, Graduated Series; Designed for Children Between the Ages of Six and Fourteen Years: Containing, Also, Information on Common Objects* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1863); and E. A. Sheldon, *A Manual of Elementary Instruction, for the Use of Public and Private Schools and Normal Classes; Containing a Graduated Course of Object Lessons for Training the Senses and Developing the Faculties of Children* (New York: Charles Scribner & Co., 1868).

⁵⁷ Greene, *Report on Object Teaching*, 10-11.

⁵⁸ Warren Burton, *The Culture of the Observing Faculties in the Family and the School: or, Things about Home, and How to Make Them Instructive to the Young* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1865), 19.

⁵⁹ Carter, *Object Lessons in American Culture*, 146.

⁶⁰ Sheldon, *A Manual of Elementary Instruction*, 395-396. “The Blind Girl” is one of five lessons included in the “first step” of the Moral Instruction portion of the manual. This section includes three additional picture lessons, focusing on lithographs entitled “Bird’s Nest,” “Saturday Night,” and “The Lion and the Mouse” (image still unlocated).

⁶¹ Much thanks to Sarah Carter, *Object Lessons in American Culture*, for locating these images in the archival collections at Winterthur and the American Antiquarian Society and placing them back in their proper historical context.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 139.

⁶³ Sheldon, *A Manual of Elementary Instruction*, 390.

⁶⁴ Although it is too long to analyze in full, here is the full text of the “Saturday Night” picture lesson, from *Ibid.*, 393-394, to give a sense of the kinds of scripts a teacher might have been asked to use or create:

4. *Sketch on Picture of “Saturday Night.”*

I. *Point Examined.*—Get the children to mention what they see in the picture—several people. Their number, sex, and relationship—there are father, mother, and four children; viz., a little boy, two girls, and a baby. What each is doing—the mother is nursing the baby; how tenderly she holds it; how careful she is of it. Refer to the kindness of their mothers when they were babies. The elder sister is washing the younger; in what manner she would do this—*kindly*, so as not to be rough, or hurt the little one; *neatly*, so as not to make the room untidy. Who is coming into the house? Who runs to meet him, and why? What the father does to the little boy? What this shows? How the girls look? These children love their father, and he loves them. What the father has been doing all day, and the day before, and all the week, ever since Monday morning? But now his week’s work is done, and he will have a day’s rest. On what day he will rest? What day comes before Sunday? This picture shows what people do on Saturday night, to be ready for Sunday. What the mother has prepared for the father (shown by reference to the two cups and saucers on the table). She will take tea with him; she has waited till he came home. What else is on the table? What on the fire? What in front of the fire? (the cat.) How she looks? How the children will treat her? Refer to the bundle the father brings in with him.

Children will say what they think it contains—food for their dinner on Sunday. How the father has prepared for Sunday? How the mother? Refer to the appearance of the room. She cleared it up before she sat down at the fireside. How the children are preparing—they will be nice and clean when Sunday comes. How pleasant it will be when they have their clean things on, and are ready for church.

II. *Application*.—From this, try to impress the children with a conviction that no work should be done on Sunday that can be helped; and that everything that can be done on Saturday to provide for Sunday, ought to be done. Let the children enumerate all the things they can do on Saturday, to prepare for Sunday.

⁶⁵ “No. 22. – A Picture Story,” *The Little Corporal* (March 1868), 48. “Answer,” *The Little Corporal* (April 1868), 64.

⁶⁶ “The English game of Cartoons,” with illustrations sent in by Mr. G. B. Bartlett, “Our Letter Box,” *Our Young Folks* 8, no. 3 (March 1872): 191. “Answer: When the Cat’s Away, the Mice Will Play.”

⁶⁷ For a useful discussion of hieroglyphic Bibles, see Morgan, *Protestants and Pictures*, 204-205. Some nineteenth-century examples, all available at the Library Company of Philadelphia, include: *A New Hieroglyphical Bible, for the Amusement & Instruction of Children; Being a Selection of the Most Useful Lessons, and Most Interesting Narratives; (Scripturally Arranged) from Genesis to the Revelations* (Jaffrey, N.H.: Salmon Wilder, 1814); *A New Hieroglyphical Bible, for The Instruction and Amusement of Good Children. Embellished with Upwards of Fifty Emblems, Neatly Engraved. To Which Is Added, A Sketch of the Life of Our Blessed Saviour, and the Four Evangelists* (Hartford: Oliver D. Cooke, 1820); *The Hieroglyphick Bible; or Select Passages in the Old and New Testament, Represented with Emblematic Figures for the Amusement of Youth*, 3rd ed. (Plymouth: Joseph Avery, 1820); and *The Hieroglyphic Bible; or Select Passages in the Old and New Testaments, Represented with Emblematical Figures, for the Amusement of Youth*, 5th ed. (Rochester: William Alling, 1841). Although rebuses were used as a form of political or social commentary in the eighteenth century (for example, Benjamin Franklin’s famous *The Art of Making Money Plenty in Every Man’s Pocket*), they were extremely popular, particularly in children’s magazines from the 1850s to the 1870s. Examples were routinely found in *The Schoolfellow: a Monthly Magazine for Boys and Girls*, *The Little Pilgrim*, *Our Young Folks*, and *The Riverside Magazine for Young People*. Toy companies sold rebus cards (examples available at the American Antiquarian Society), and other businesses used them in their advertising campaigns.

⁶⁸ Back cover advertisement, *Jack and the Bean-Stalk*, 1855.

⁶⁹ Quoted from the American Tract Society's *Family Christian Almanac* of 1869, in Morgan, *Protestants and Pictures*, 233.

⁷⁰ Robin Bolton-Smith, "Sentimental Paintings of Lilly Martin Spencer," *Magazine Antiques* 104 (1973): 108-15; and Bolton-Smith, *Lilly Martin Spencer*, 27. For more background information regarding Spencer and her life, see Katz, *Regionalism and Reform*.

⁷¹ Johns, *American Genre Painting*, 137-175; and Katz, *Regionalism and Reform*, xvii, 30-59.

⁷² Stewart, *The Look of Reading*, 245.

⁷³ "Miscellany: The Philosophy of Fiction," *The Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge* (March 1831): 189.

⁷⁴ *Jack and the Beanstalk. A New Version. To Which is Added Little Jane and Her Mother* (Boston: William Crosby and Company, 1841); and *Jack and the Bean-Stalk: A New Version. To Which Is Added, Little Jane and Her Mother* (Boston: Wm. J. Reynolds, 1844), located at the New York Public Library.

⁷⁵ "Frauds on the Fairies," *The Albion, A Journal of News, Politics, and Literature* (Oct. 22, 1853): 3; and John Rogers Thomas, "Once Upon a Time," *Ladies' Wreath, a Magazine Devoted to Literature, Industry, and Religion* (Sept. 1, 1853): 3.

⁷⁶ "A Few Words on Fairy Tales," *Putnam's Monthly Magazine of American Literature, Science, and Art* (July 1857): 58.

⁷⁷ *The Girl's Pleasure Book. With Elegant Illustrations Printed in Oil Colors* (New York: Hurd & Houghton, Publishers, ca. 1850s).

⁷⁸ This title was given to the painting later in its life, which explains why the story is identified as "Goldenlocks" rather than "Silver-hair," as the Goldilocks story evolved over time to its more modern incarnation.

⁷⁹ *A Treasury of Pleasure Books for Young Children, with more than 100 illustrations by John Absolon and Harrison Weir* (London: Grant and Griffith, 1850); *A Treasury of Pleasure Books for Young People: Illustrated with One Hundred and Sixty-eight Pictures by Eminent Artists* (London: Sampson Low & Son, 1856); *The Story of the Three Bears* (New York: Published by W. C. Locke & Co., ca. 1850s); and *The Girl's Pleasure Book*.

⁸⁰ See G. W. Sheldon, *American Painters: With One Hundred and Four Examples of Their Work Engraved on Wood* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1881): 65-70; "Seymour Joseph Guy" in *American Art and American Art Collections: Essays on Artistic Subjects by the Best Art Writers, Fully Illustrated with Etchings, Photo-Etchings, Photogravures, Phototypes, and Engravings on Steel and Wood by the Most Celebrated Artists* (Boston: E. W. Walker & Co., 1889); and Weinberg, *American Stories*.

⁸¹ Wendy Bellion examines another case of font size manipulation and how it can affect meaning, in Bellion, *Citizen Spectator*, 199-201.

⁸² A Mother [Budden, Maria Elizabeth], *Thoughts on Domestic Education, the Result of Experience* (Boston: Carter & Hendee, 1829), 36; "To Make a Happy Home," *The Christian Recorder* (August 2, 1862); "Family Reading," reprinted from the *New York Observer*, in *The Colored American* (February 2, 1839); and "Read Aloud," *Godey's Lady's Book* (February 1861).

⁸³ Henry Bursill, *Hand Shadows to Be Thrown Upon the Wall: A Series of Novel and Amusing Figures Formed by the Hand* (London: Griffith and Farran, 1859); and *Hand Shadow Stories* (Boston: Taggard & Thompson, 1863).

⁸⁴ "Christmas Games," *Arthur's Home Magazine* 31 (Jan. 1868): 60; and "The Extemporaneous Party," *The Riverside Magazine for Young People* 1, no. 1 (January 1867), 6.

⁸⁵ Most scholarly work relating to silhouettes in America addresses portraiture from the eighteenth and early nineteenth century: Gwendolyn Dubois Shaw, "'Moses Williams, Cutter of Profiles': Silhouettes and African American Identity in the Early Republic," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 149, no. 1 (Mar. 2005): 22-39; and Anne Verplanck, "The Silhouette and Quaker Identity in Early National Philadelphia," *Winterthur Portfolio* 43, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 41-78. Anecdotal history from the nineteenth century is sketched in the work of an avid collector, Alice Van Leer Carrick, *A History of American Silhouettes: A Collector's Guide, 1790-1840* (Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle, Co., 1968). "How to Cut Out Likenesses," *The Riverside Magazine for Young People* 3, no. 26 (Feb. 1869): 83; and W. Newman, *Moveable Shadows for the People* (London: Dean & Son, 1859).

⁸⁶ Lubin, *Picturing a Nation*, 238-239.

⁸⁷ Alfred L. Sewell, "Red Ridinghood and the Wolf. The Great Prize," *The Little Corporal* (November 1867): 76; Edward Eggleston, "The Rhyme of Little Red Ridinghood," *The Little Corporal* (December 1867): 88; "The Great Prize. Red

Ridinghood and the Wolf,” *The Little Corporal* (December 1867): 92; and Ella L. Wolcott, “Playing Red Ridinghood,” *The Little Corporal* (January, 1868): 8.

⁸⁸ Wright, “Men Making Meaning,” 98-100.

⁸⁹“The Academy Exhibition,” *The Art Journal* 5 (1879): 159.

⁹⁰ “Story Telling in Schools,” *American Annals of Education* (May 1837): 217.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

The decline of interest in storytelling genre painting after the 1860s has been noted by many scholars, who together have offered a variety of explanations. Elizabeth Johns has asserted that this decline arose in large part from a lack of need for social typing, for as the population of the country diversified, typing became less possible. She further argued that interest shifted from public culture to domestic culture after class hierarchies had been established beyond question.¹ H. Barbara Weinberg, in contrast, ascribes the shift to changing influences on American artists, who were moving away from British and German conventions and looking more towards Parisian academies and private ateliers, which resulted in anti-narrative impulse and “an appreciation of the journalistic, candid, fragmented, oblique narrative that inflected foreign examples.”² Storytelling paintings were closely tied in the popular imagination to contemporary literature and the kinds of images that appeared in popular prints, illustrations, and advertising. As the publication of images became even more ubiquitous with the introduction of chromolithographs and the half-tone process, among others, mass market illustrators found more and more work, and fine artists struggled to differentiate themselves from the kinds of commercial art they produced. They shied away from subject matter that could be associated with illustration, and as Sarah Burns has argued, painters struggling to make names for themselves were forced to make a show of divorcing themselves from the very commercialism that helped them survive economically.³ Art criticism also changed as

the century progressed, with individual critics like Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer and Clarence Cook, among others, setting professionalizing standards that rendered their role less narrative, with more formal analysis and critique. As art-for-art's-sake and aestheticism rose to prominence in the art world, subject matter was implicitly devalued, particularly the types of narrative that concerned talk and storytelling. Critics came to favor the more emotional and meditative paintings produced by European-trained artists who grouped together to form the Society of American Artists, branching off from the NAD in 1877. Old academic styles fell out of fashion, including the kinds of genre paintings that were viewed so favorably in its heyday twenty years before, and art critics worked to create secure borders for the art world, narrowing public access to art and limiting amateur efforts at producing it.⁴

Oratory also diminished in American culture, with the stump speeches and lyceum lectures of the past overtaken by new modes of engaging in public life. Traveling art spectacles accompanied by zealous lecturing artists were replaced by a greater range of private galleries, artists' studios, and public museums. Ironically, this occurred even as American culture was getting louder and even more interested in sound and its production and reproduction—Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone in 1876 and Thomas Edison invented the phonograph in 1877, arousing a fervor of interest in the reproducibility of sound. Nevertheless, these social and technological changes problematized older modes of orality. As Lisa Gitelman has argued, “the most important cultural precondition for the phonograph” was a desire to make the dead speak and to allow the present to “be stored up and never left behind.” She sees recording technologies as modes of inscription, not simply changes to how Americans encountered sound, and in some ways these new modes of inscription

altered older formulae for storytelling. Even the telephone was dialogic to the point of exclusion. Two people could communicate freely, yet the telephone was not conducive (at the time) to group talking or group hearing.⁵ An investigation into how these sonic developments impacted visual imagery could prove very fruitful, yet is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Storytelling did not vanish from the American art world. Professional illustrators took up the mantle and produced complicated and sophisticated imagery to accompany an ever greater range of print material. Painters too, like Seymour Joseph Guy, John George Brown, and Louis Charles Moeller, continued to produce genre paintings, yet while their paintings sold, they were often ignored or derided by critics, who valued different styles as time went on.

Nevertheless, during the years between 1830 and 1870, Americans encountered storytelling images more often in public at exhibition spaces and in private as mass-distributed prints. This dissertation has sought to reevaluate these images and reinsert them into a social milieu rich with storytelling and orality, public lectures, private recitations, and reading aloud. Although some saw storytelling as a useless or immoral way to spend an idle hour, for the most part storytellers were valued by art critics and popular taste alike, and visual artists were described as storytellers as well. Of course narrative is not a uniquely American experience, yet during this time the storyteller was cast as a characteristically American figure, his distinct speech and humor intertwining and overlapping with the social types of the Yankee or Jonathan, the backwoodsman or mountain man, and revolutionary grandfathers with their stories of the country's founding. During these decades, art criticism frequently meant descriptive writing as much as formal analysis, and viewers

might respond to works they had seen by writing a friend with a lengthy description of the story they encountered in it, or penning a poem to respond to a host of other writings about a sculpture, painting, or panorama that had captured the public imagination. Narrative art was the pinnacle of artistic production, and viewing storytelling genre paintings was an interactive, learned, and multisensory experience. Artists like Mount directly engaged with many of these issues by painting scenes of storytelling in action. Mount called on conventions of the distinctly American “tough story” to draw viewers into a complicated process of remembering and imagining, putting words into the mouths of painted characters, such that a genre painting became a talking object, not a silent one. He highlighted orality and aurality, and he addressed narrative and voice both in his subject matter and, self-referentially, as a practice in which visual artists engage.

Storytelling and representational strategies were as much a matter for debate in the nineteenth-century as they are in the art history classrooms of today. Not only did viewers learn how to read stories in images from descriptive art criticism and stories published with illustrations—reading images was a learned ability, and as the century progressed materials produced for young audiences attempted to give them the skills necessary to negotiate the increasingly dense visual world around them. Primers, storybooks, and the heavily illustrated texts and drawing manuals of Jacob Abbott, in particular, served to introduce children to their roles as interpreters of meaning. The process of viewing a genre picture and deriving a story and a moral from it involved mental work, as did listening to a story and envisioning the described events and characters. Spencer and Guy created paintings that tackled this process of mental visualization in paint, attempting to represent what it looked like to tell stories, hear

them, and imagine them. As this dissertation has argued throughout, such storytelling paintings actively involved the participation of viewers, who mirrored the storytelling and talk (whether in historically less-recoverable voice or more readily available print), mental visualization, and listening they saw on display before them.

Storytelling, discourse, dialogue, oration, and narrative: these were the impulses so fundamental to the thinking viewer's experience of works by Mount, Woodville, Spencer, and other mid-century genre painters working for American audiences.

This dissertation has attempted to see how genre paintings produced during the middle decades of the nineteenth century represented a societal and artistic interest in storytelling itself as a cultural expression. For Americans during this time period, the visual discernment of narratives was a skill necessary for both public and private engagement with the arts.

ENDNOTES

¹ Johns, *American Genre Painting*, 197-202.

² Weinberg, *American Stories*, xiv-xv.

³ Michele H. Bogart, *Artists, Advertising, and the Borders of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); and Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist*.

⁴ For excellent discussions of these changes in art criticism in the late nineteenth century, see Dearing, *Rave Reviews*; and Mancini, *Pre-Modernism*.

⁵ Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines*, 22. My thanks to Wendy Bellion for pointing out the ways in which dialogic telephones in some ways prohibited orality while simultaneously allowing it across great distances.

FIGURES

IMAGES REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHTING

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