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**Meaning of the art of William M. Harnett**

**Mandeles, Chad, Ph.D.**

**City University of New York, 1995**

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MEANING IN THE ART OF WILLIAM M. HARNETT

by

CHAD MANDELES

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in  
Art History in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,  
The City University of New York

1995


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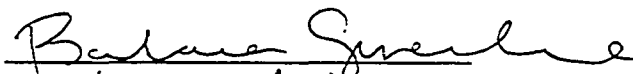
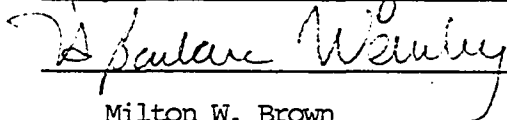
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The City University of New York

To my Mother and the memory of my Father

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thanks go to my mother Francine and my dear wife Yuriko.

## PREFACE

By 1892, the year that William Michael Harnett died, his still-life paintings were commonly thought and acknowledged to be paradigms of deceptive realism. But Harnett's illusionistic pictures, however popular and eye-catching in his own time, were largely forgotten over the next four decades. After a number of Harnett's works had resurfaced at The Downtown Gallery in New York in the late 1930s, commentators began to encourage the view that his still lifes were arbitrary arrangements of carefully delineated forms, and, audaciously, that they might be construed as a species of modernism. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Alfred Frankenstein, the music and art critic for the San Francisco Chronicle, re-evaluated the stylistic and formal bases of paintings attributed to Harnett and made the classic separation between the artist's "hard" and "soft" styles. Acting in the role of sleuth, Frankenstein came to recognize that Harnett had painted the pictures in the "hard" style, while those in the "soft" style were the work of Harnett's friend, the still-life painter John Frederick Peto. Over the next three decades, writers and critics maintained the general emphasis on the stylistic and formal aspects of Harnett's paintings. As in earlier discussions, their critical analyses tended to disregard the issue of meaning. More recently, however, the question of meaning in the art of Harnett has begun to emerge as an area of interest and speculation. This interest was

evident in the catalogue that accompanied the retrospective exhibition of Harnett's work held several years ago at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth, The Fine Art Museums of San Francisco, and The National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. Among the twenty-two essays (which dealt with almost every aspect of his development), the catalogue could boast six that considered, to varying degrees, the idea of meaning in Harnett's work.<sup>1</sup> The authors of these essays—Roxanna Robinson, Jennifer Hardin, Thayer Tolles Mickel, Judy L. Larson, Marc Simpson, and the present author—provided a serviceable introduction to the question of iconographic meaning in Harnett's art (see Chapter 2), and, perhaps, demonstrated that iconographic interpretation has its risks as well as its rewards. Together with Barbara S. Groseclose's 1987 study of the artist's writing table and bachelor pictures in the context of *vanitas* imagery,<sup>2</sup> these catalogue essays represent the range of currently envisioned possibilities.

Late in the course of his relatively brief life, Harnett himself provided us with a richly suggestive, but puzzling, statement of his interest in narrative content in an interview that appeared in the *New York News*: "I always group my figures, so as to try and make an artistic composition. I endeavor to make the composition tell a story."<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, tempting as it is to associate Harnett's testimony with some sort of commitment to narrative content and meaning, we cannot be sure what he meant. The problem is, nevertheless, worthy of serious consideration because we would like, if we can, to determine what Harnett meant by the claim "I endeavor to make the composition tell a story." The answer (to the degree that one can be

formulated) would not only help put Harnett's work in a humane perspective but expand our understanding of the scope and depth of his vision.

This dissertation will endeavor to address a select set of questions about Harnett's art and iconography. These questions have to do with the narrative dimension of Harnett's work, with the nature of meaning in his paintings, and with how and to what degree allegorical messages are expressed. It should be stated immediately that, in his own time, Harnett's still-life paintings (and American still life in general) did not attract criticism bent on iconographic interpretation. And while today this tendency no longer obtains in academic study of Harnett's work (or, for that matter, American art), there exists a history of criticism and scholarly writing that dismisses or simply ignores the idea that Harnett's pictures (or American still life) might contain coordinated symbolic programs. There are, nonetheless, compelling reasons for arguing that symbolism was an unrecognized but vital line of force in Harnett's oeuvre. It will, of course, be necessary to ask, How could Harnett have attempted to invest his paintings with symbolism without the fact arousing any appreciable comment? How could this situation have occurred? For this reason, the first and second chapters of the dissertation will present some basic considerations in the critical defenses of, and objections to, still-life painting in the United States in general and the critical reaction to Harnett's work in particular.

It is plain that ever since Harnett's paintings appeared, the reactions of viewers and commentators have been concerned with his realistic style and illusionistic proclivities. While conceding that Harnett's technique is sometimes a

dazzling and almost always a crowd-pleasing feature of his work, the third and fourth chapters argue that, fairly consistently over the course of his career, Harnett executed works that not only presented themselves in a highly realistic form but engaged patterns of symbolic meaning. It is my hypothesis that there is in a number of his paintings, including some of his more ambitious efforts, a close and demanding relationship between subject matter and style. Thus, this dissertation proposes to consider an inner coherence and depth of meaning in a range of Harnett's pictures, from one end of his career to the other.

Sixty years ago it was fashionable to view Harnett's compositions as a "combination of meticulous realism with an arbitrary juxtaposition of unrelated objects," as Edith Gregor Halpert, the director of The Downtown Gallery, put it.<sup>4</sup> The most recent evidence indicates, however, that at the very least the iconography of a select number of his paintings exhibits interrelated and definitive forms of meaning. Indeed, we do not need to rely on Harnett's own words or the testimony of critics to know that Mortality and Immortality (1876; Wichita Art Museum, Wichita, Kansas), Memento Mori--"To This Favour" (1879; Cleveland Art Museum), and To This Favor--A Thought from Shakespeare (1879; Private collection) strongly affirm the tradition of vanitas. The evidence is clear in his choice of iconographic programs that in each case centered on a skull, the most explicit and unequivocal symbol of death, and in which the supporting cast of motifs all had relevance to the idea that human hopes are futile and human effort worthless.

However, it should be noted that in no paintings beyond the three skull

pictures is Harnett's interest in symbolizing the vanity of earthly existence made so obvious. In the face of this situation one wonders to what extent iconographic programs bearing traces of symbolism occur in Harnett's art. While it seems certain that symbolic meaning does not appear in all or even most of Harnett's pictures, I believe that allegory figures in works more numerous, and in ways more surprising, than has been commonly supposed. In my efforts to unearth meaning in the art of Harnett, it became increasingly my view that ruminations on life and death as well as on life in death, abounded in his paintings. Consequently, in this dissertation I will suggest an order and design within the disparities of Harnett's oeuvre that hint persistently at a pious belief that the visual world, on which our lives are often predicated, is merely an illusion. I selected a mixed population of Harnett's pictures that might reflect these themes, generally excepting his "writing table and bachelor pieces" that have been, and may again be, explored by Groseclose. Thus, the dissertation will examine a number of paintings that, beyond Harnett's early preoccupation with the skull motif, seem to declare some tentative correspondences to the time-honored theme of vanitas. I want to draw attention, for example, to Job Lot Cheap (1878; Reynolda House, Museum of American Art, Winston-Salem, North Carolina) and The Social Club (1879; Manoogian Collection, Taylor, Michigan) as traditional variations on the subject, and suggest that the ghost of the vanitas tradition may be summoned up in paintings such as A Study Table (1882; Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, New York). But I also will show that Harnett was capable of elaborate and versatile formulations, such as Ease (1887; Amon Carter Museum, Fort

Worth, Texas), that seem to obscure, but really extend traditional schemes. In this regard I shall examine a number of works painted near the end of his career, such as The Old Cupboard Door (1889; City Art Galleries, Sheffield, England) and Old Models (1892; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), in which the iconographic programs seem to fulfill his confidence in the experience of death and resurrection.

Harnett has, and undoubtedly shall continue to have, a devoted following that will continue to point out to us his scrupulous attention to visual appearances to the exclusion, in the critic Hilton Kramer's mind, of "some larger purpose or vision."<sup>5</sup> This dissertation attempts to lay to rest the premise that Harnett's art is devoid of the intellectual complexities of meaning. Against the old charge that Harnett aimed at nothing more than reproducing the look of the physical world, or that his pictures were composed merely of the commonplaces of his studio or his patrons's homes, I am aiming at showing how a sense of purposiveness operates in the artist's decisions about matters of iconography and composition. In attempting to go beyond the popular cliché of Harnett as technical wizard, this dissertation will consider the ways in which both subject matter and style participated in the expression of symbolic meaning.

In this era of methodological self-consciousness, it may be necessary to point out that while I am concerned with investigating the iconography of Harnett's paintings, my approach is essentially eclectic. It can be illustrated by the famous passage in Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland in which Alice asks, "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?" in response to which the Cheshire

Cat declares, "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to." I am not aiming at becoming an assiduous expositor of a critical method, or at using the art of Harnett to serve the needs of a critical theory. On the contrary, while iconology is virtually unavoidable as an instrument of interpretation in this dissertation, the iconographic reading of Harnett's work is an appropriate pathway to my destination, it is not the destination itself. If this effort has any hope of attaining to the truth, it will be because questions of iconography and meaning will be closely bound up with questions of established artistic and literary tradition, and with ideas that were demonstrably alive in Harnett's time.

I hope that the proposed interpretations will stimulate further investigation into the question of meaning in Harnett's art, and lead to greater refinement and a more nuanced understanding of his work.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>See Roxanna Robinson, "Common Objects of Everyday Life," 164-66; Jennifer Hardin, "The Late Years," 185-89; Thayer Tolles Mickel, "Permanent Perishables: The Artist's Fruit Paintings," 214, 216; Judy L. Larson, "Literary References in Harnett's Still-Life Paintings," 265-73; Marc Simpson, "Harnett and Music: Many a Touching Melody," 290-91; and the present author, "Grave Counsel: Harnett and Vanitas," 253-61, in William M. Harnett, ed. Doreen Bolger, Marc Simpson, John Wilmerding, exh. cat. (Amon Carter Museum: Fort Worth, Texas; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1992).

<sup>2</sup>See Barbara S. Groseclose, "Vanity and the Artist: Some Still-Life Paintings by William Michael Harnett," American Art Journal 19, no. 1 (1987), 51-59.

<sup>3</sup>"Painted Like Real Things; The Man Whose Pictures are a Wonder and a Puzzle," New York News, undated clipping in The Downtown Gallery Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., roll ND/27, frame 128.

<sup>4</sup>Edith Gregor Halpert, "William M. Harnett," intro. "Nature-Vivre" by William M. Harnett, exh. cat. (New York: Downtown Gallery, 1939), n.p.

<sup>5</sup>Hilton Kramer, "In Harnett, Met Elevates Bogus American Classic," New York Observer 6, no. 16 (27 April 1992), 23.

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CHAPTER 1  
OBSERVATIONS ON THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF WILLIAM M.  
HARNETT AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY STILL-LIFE PAINTING

As a master of trompe l'oeil painting, William Michael Harnett (1848-92) is unsurpassed in the history of American art. Indeed, his skill was so fine and dexterous that he is commonly viewed as one of the grand practitioners of the trompe l'oeil tradition. Critics and writers have from the first emphasized the startling illusionism of Harnett's paintings and his eye for pictorial design, as if mesmerized by the lure of his formal artistic style. It is plain that such concerns are hardly trivial or incidental in discussions of the artist's work. Yet these matters of form are emphasized to such an extent that questions of meaning have surfaced only occasionally; and explorations of meaning have not always been based on anything demonstrable. A particularly egregious example can be attributed to the eminent art historian Wolfgang Born, who took up the issue of iconography and meaning in an article on Harnett published in 1946. With reference to a picture entitled Old Souvenir, he wrote:

We need to know much more than we do about Harnett's life in order to unearth the foundations of his enigmatic work, but we can grasp an occasional hint which, in the light of other clues gives something to go on. The slips of paper, for instance, may betray something the painter chose not to reveal directly. If the fire insurance poster really suggests a smoldering desire, the photograph of the little girl might suggest that the actual content of the Old Souvenir is the

restrained lament of a solitary man who longs without hope for the return of a childhood love.<sup>1</sup>

The critic Alfred Frankenstein undertook to refute this connection by successfully demonstrating that the painting Old Souvenirs (Fig. 1) was not, in fact, the work of Harnett, but that of John Frederick Peto (1854-1907).<sup>2</sup> In the process, Frankenstein sanctioned a modern prejudice against what he quaintly described as the "pretentious, pseudoscientific effort to cater to the make-the-picture-tell-a-story trade."<sup>3</sup>

The main difficulty of iconographic interpretation of Harnett's pictures, aside from an earlier fear of Frankenstein, stems from the fact that there are no known contemporary remarks or observations that are directed to the issue of meaning in his work. Art historians have not failed to notice this gap; and as a result the automatic priority that has generally been assigned to formal and stylistic analysis of his painting has seemed in order. Several recent studies, however, have raised with encouraging success the question of meaning and the way it operates in Harnett's decisions about iconography.<sup>4</sup> It is clear from these studies that iconographic analysis can augment the viewpoint obtainable from a formal stylistic approach and lead to a more comprehensive understanding of Harnett's art and time. But despite the growing tendency of scholars to expand the relatively narrow range of interpretations of Harnett's oeuvre to include aspects of iconography, and to consider the formal aspects of his painting as in some ways participating in the expression of meaning, the iconographic terrain of Harnett's work remains largely unexplored.

The reasons for this remarkable situation lie not in the fact that the evidence needed for iconographic interpretation is necessarily remote and arcane, but

that it has persistently been overlooked. In the face of this situation one wonders what there is about the style and subject matter of Harnett's paintings that has insured their virtual immunity from questions of iconography and meaning. The answer may be traceable to the historical process by which the critical enterprise has yielded to formal concerns, and in which Harnett's pictures came to internalize their connection to the traditional iconography of still life. Knowledge of the historiography of Harnett and nineteenth-century still-life painting may well be essential for understanding thoroughly why the study of meaning in the artist's work has so far languished.

Soon after Harnett's death in 1892, a writer named Louisa Trumbull Cogswell described him as "a worthy successor to the celebrated Grecians in his ability to represent inanimate objects with such fidelity as to produce an effect of reality."<sup>5</sup> It is not surprising to learn that in discussions of Harnett's work, Pliny the Elder's time-honored account of "the celebrated Grecians" is continually invoked.

The story goes this way:

Parrhasios and Zeuxis entered into competition, Zeuxis exhibiting a picture of some grapes, so true to nature that the birds flew up to the wall of the stage. Parrhasios then displayed a picture of a linen curtain, realistic to such a degree that Zeuxis, elated by the verdict of the birds, cried out that now at last his rival must draw the curtain and show his picture. On discovering his mistake he surrendered the prize to Parrhasios, admitting candidly that he had deceived the birds, while Parrhasios had deluded himself, a painter.<sup>6</sup>

For Pliny, the artist's skill at reproducing the look and feel of the real world was quite simply the measure of his excellence: imitation was inseparable from art. So obvious was this concept to nineteenth-century observers that in the antagonism

between realism and idealism the famous account of Pliny was rejoiced in by realists, or those who sought a credible illusion of the material world, and deplored by idealists, who gave preference to expressions of the imagination and the inner life of the individual. Consequently, references to Pliny echoed through the nineteenth century as a kind of litmus test of one's aesthetic viewpoint. By drawing a connection between Harnett and Pliny's story, commentators like Cogswell underscored the formal appeal of the artist's work: his ability to create convincing illusions along the lines of Zeuxis and Parrhasios.

To the degree that Harnett's artistic voice and pictorial language reflected the taste of Pliny, it was a general tendency among critics and observers to stress formal style and elementary aspects of subject matter in discussions of his work, and then to use this analysis to force the argument over the conflict between realism and imitation, on the one hand, and idealism and imagination, on the other. The art critic Clarence Cook's comments on the National Academy of Design exhibition in the New-York Daily Tribune of 26 April 1879, for example, were charged with these prevalent critical issues. Predicating his position on a dichotomy between works that explore the forces of mind and feeling and those that capture mere appearances, Cook began by commending John Singer Sargent's (1856-1925) Neapolitan Children Bathing of 1879 (Fig. 2) as "his impression of a beautiful combination of light, air and color," and then moved on to a flower painting by Martin Johnson Heade (1819-1904).<sup>7</sup> "This is a neat, carefully painted scientific illustration of certain botanical facts," he wrote, "but it is not a work of art." He continued with the

attitude of smug condescension:

Of course there are many people who think honest reporting of facts every bit as good as poetic interpretation of them, and with such people there is no use arguing; it is not a matter for argument, it is matter for feeling to decide. Just as there are scores of people who look at and admire Mr. Heade's picture while comparatively few either look at or admire Mr. Sargent's picture hung just beneath it, so there are many who stop and look with delight at Mr. W. M. Harnett's "The Social Club," [Fig. 3] . . . and find all this minute painting, this high finish as they call it, the most admirable thing in the whole gallery. And yet, conceding to each of these works all that its most ardent admirers demand, is it not plain that in most of these examples, art has nothing to do with their production, that they are only mechanical toys?

And he added:

Last year Mr. William M. Harnett had several pictures in the Exhibition of the same general character as this "Social Club" and they attracted the attention that is always given to curiosities, to works in which the skill of the human hand is ostentatiously displayed working in deceptive imitation of Nature.

Anticipating possible objections to this point of view, he himself raised the issue of artistic precedents.

An essay might be written on this subject of imitative art, and it could be shown by a score of examples culled from the old books, from Pliny down to Vasari, that even in the ages we call the best this attempt to deceive the senses has been reckoned one of the legitimate aims of art. But it is equally true that all the greatest artists--even Durer and Holbein--have known how to keep this imitative skill in its true place, as servant not as master, as a means or adjunct, not as an end, while the greatest names of all in the list of men of genius never attempted imitation at all.

His tone grew even more blunt as he continued:

Only a very few artists of merit have ever condescended to apply their skill to the sole purpose of imitation, making so-called pictures out of dead objects painted to deceive the eye as far as possible, for there still remains a little dignity of purpose attaching to flower-pieces, game-pieces and the like, and great painters, among them Vollon, of our own time, have occasionally wreaked their superfluous strength and sportive leisure on the painting [of] pots and pans so sublimely as almost to make us ashamed of our principles. But we must remember that this is only the play of good painters, never their serious

employment.<sup>8</sup>

By way of explaining this distinction, Cook then turned from the French artist Antoine Vollon (1833-1900) to Harnett, and declared flatly:

The real fact is that this charge of inferiority is justified by the consideration that this imitative work is not really so difficult as it seems to the layman, and though there are degrees of it, yet when we come down to works like this of Mr. Harnett, it is evident that only time and industry are necessary to the indefinite multiplication of them. . . . There is far too much of this merely external painting in our Academy, this painting by recipe, of which the critics complain, and in their complaint only give voice to the discontent of the general public. When we are called on by our duty to study an exhibition of American pictures like this in detail, we are more and more painfully impressed with the mechanism of execution, the materialism of the thinking--and how little here deserves the name of "thinking"--that covers the walls.

So much for Harnett. The writer stated further that artistic merit was a quality that could be found only "in works that promise a new departure even if on closer inspection they do not altogether fulfill the promise." Indeed, he granted this special dispensation to a revived George Fuller (1822-84) because his recent efforts, "with all their mannerism and incompleteness, do insist with us upon their right to be respected as genuine attempts at utterance of individual thinking."<sup>9</sup> Of course, Harnett made hundreds of paintings and among them were a fair share of potboilers. But in any case, Cook regarded Harnett's style as backward looking; and Cook's view that Harnett's work was not only materialistic but old-fashioned all but nullified his thoughtful consideration of Harnett's work. To Cook's eye, Fuller was to some degree seeking to create a new mode of expression while Harnett was content to preserve a mode created in the past.

In this context, the passing reference to Pliny and Vasari earlier in the

review appears as more than just an art historical embellishment. The name Pliny, in particular, was already synonymous with the appreciation of "imitative art." And the kind of art endorsed by Pliny in antiquity and by Vasari in the sixteenth century--an art of a kind that, as Cook noted disparagingly, continued to attract "many who stop and look with delight"--was dismissed here as superficial and inferior. It would seem that the linkage of Harnett to these distant authors was meant to bestow upon the painter, in addition to an outdated and unprogressive taste, a lowly and uninspired approach. Indeed, this conviction can be seen as part of a well-established hostility toward the notion of imitation in art. It was a commonplace of art theory and commentary from the eighteenth century well into Harnett's time, and deserves extended consideration for any clear sense of why Harnett's critics so often thought the way they did.

On this subject the first president of the Royal Academy in London, Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-92), was unequivocal. In his Thirteenth Discourse, delivered before the Royal Academy in 1786, Reynolds declared:

Painting is not only not to be considered as an imitation, operating by deception, but that it is, and ought to be, in many points of view, and strictly speaking, no imitation at all of external nature. Perhaps it ought to be as far removed from the vulgar idea of imitation, as the refined civilized state in which we live, is removed from a gross state of nature; and those who have not cultivated their imaginations, which the majority of mankind certainly have not, may be said, in regard to arts, to continue in this state of nature.

He proceeded to inform his audience that,

Such men will always prefer imitation to that excellence which is addressed to another faculty that they do not possess; but these are not the persons to whom a Painter is to look, any more than a judge of morals and manners ought to refer controverted points upon those subjects to the opinions of people taken from the

banks of the Ohio or from New Holland.<sup>10</sup>

It is not difficult to hear these words resonating in Cook's review of the National Academy of Design exhibition of 1879.

Henry Fuseli (1741-1825), who served as Professor of Painting and the Keeper of the Royal Academy, made it clear that Pliny's name was bound up with this unenlightened estimation of painting as "an imitation," as something "operating in deception," to re-use Reynolds's phrase. In an introduction to his Lectures on Painting, published in 1831, Fuseli voiced his considerable disdain for Pliny's aesthetic frame of mind. "In Pliny it is necessary, and for an artist not very difficult," he wrote, "to distinguish when he speaks from himself and when he delivers an extract, however short; whenever he does the first, he is seldom able to separate the kernel from the husk; he is credulous, irrelevant, ludicrous."<sup>11</sup> This disdain for the ancient Roman author reappeared in John Smythe Memes's History of Sculpture, Painting, and Architecture, published in 1834:

The praises bestowed by the Greek and Roman writers upon their paintings are overcharged; and that these were much inferior to their sculptures. This opinion is founded not upon any alleged inferiority of means, for, besides the difficulty of exactly comprehending certain passages on this subject, we do find, that the ancient artists were armed with all the powers of fresco-painting, in which the grandest conceptions of modern talent are embodied. But these very descriptions, in many of which are accounts of very complicated expression, show that the writers, and especially Pliny, the most circumstantial, either did not truly feel the nature and object of beauty in painting; or they evince, that if such effects were attempted, the art was devoid of that simplicity and natural expression which constitute the primeval source, the all-pervading principle, of beauty and of grandeur, of truth and excellence, in antique sculpture.<sup>12</sup>

Like that of Fuseli, Memes's dismissive attitude towards Pliny corresponded to a negative conception of the term "imitation." "One class of effects

in an imitative art," Memes noted, "is, doubtless, to produce sensations which can be immediately compared with the more obvious effects and appearances of nature. . . . This, however, though a primary, is the lowest object of the artist."<sup>13</sup>

Fuseli's one-time friend John Opie (1761-1807), on the other hand, viewed the idea of imitation quite differently, at least as he applied it to the subject of chiaroscuro. But Opie, like his contemporaries, identified the issue of imitation with Pliny. In his Third Lecture, read at the Royal Academy in 1807 and published posthumously in 1809, Opie observed:

The paintings of Parrhasius were termed realities, being possessed of such a force of chiaroscuro as no longer to appear the imitations of things, but the things themselves. Agreeable to this is the observation of an ancient writer, that, in painting, the contours of objects should be blended with, and sometimes lost in, the shade; for on this, joined to colouring, depend tenderness, roundness, and the similitude to truth. Nicias, the Athenian, is also praised by Pliny for his knowledge in this branch of the art. He preserved the lights and shades, and was particularly careful that his paintings should project from the canvas. But the greatest effect of this kind is, by the same author, attributed to the pencil of Apelles:--"In his portrait of Alexander in the character of Jupiter," says Pliny, "the fingers seem to shoot forward, and the lightning to be out of the picture." This passage is too striking to need a comment.

Opie ended this thought by declaring, "What more could we say of the finest examples of modern art? What more could we expect from the pencil even of Rembrandt or of Reynolds!"<sup>14</sup> Reynolds might have scorned such praise had he been alive to hear it. And it would have been small comfort for him that while Opie did not hail "from the banks of the Ohio" he did come from a Cornish mining district on the coast of the Atlantic.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in America, however, not far from Philadelphia's Schuylkill River, the aesthetic implications of Pliny's

writings had offered an ideal that an appreciable number of American artists strove for, an ideal in which illusionism was a measure of artistic skill. Although portrait painting was more the rule than the exception in eighteenth-century American art, the inaugural exhibition in 1795 of the Columbianum in Philadelphia--an art organization modeled after the Royal Academy in London--included a remarkable number of still lifes: Among the 170 works shown in the exhibition, at least twenty-nine would appear to have fallen under the category of still life--that is, almost one out of every six works.<sup>15</sup> (By comparison, of the 735 works exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1795, only four can be readily identified as still lifes--fewer than one out of every 184 works.<sup>16</sup>) Four of the works in the Columbianum exhibition are listed in the catalogue as "Deceptions"--three by Samuel Lewis (1756 or 1757-1822) and one by the young Raphaelle Peale (1774-1825). Their common title reflects the intention on the part of these artists to fool the eye of the spectator, and we can suppose the title was intended to represent something positive and pleasing about the character of the works and the artists responsible. As the title "Deception" implies a process of observation and revelation, it has the feel of a term understood and well-regarded by artist and viewer alike.

To this lineup of deceptions must be added Charles Willson Peale's (1741-1827) justly famous trompe l'oeil portrait of his sons Raphaelle and Titian Ramsay (1780-98) on a staircase, known today as The Staircase Group (Fig. 4). Charles Willson's illusionistic handling of the painting shows Titian Ramsay standing atop an unseen portion of the winding stairs and peeking out at the spectator; he shifts

his head and right knee forward so as to catch the light and thereby appear to break the continuity of the picture plane, while Raphaelle's right arm and shoulder and the upper half of his maulstick extend into the recessed shadows of the picture, as if he were still standing in the real space of the viewer. In order to make the deception complete, a wooden step, which matched the illusionistic steps of the painting, was placed at the base of the canvas, projecting out into the spectator's space. This trompe l'oeil painting follows close after Charles Willson had apparently made a waxwork figure of himself as a model for deception. It may be worth citing an account of this lost waxwork, taken from History of Philadelphia, 1609-1884 of 1884 by J. Thomas Scharf and Thompson Westcott, which conveys something of Peale's delight in the pure feat of fooling-the-eye:

The Rev. Manassah Cutler, . . . relates the following anecdote:

"Immediately after dinner we called on Mr. Peale to see his collection of paintings and curiosities. We were conducted into a room by a boy, who told us Mr. Peale would wait on us in a minute or two. He desired us, however, to walk into the room where the curiosities were, and showed us a long narrow entry which led into the room. I observed, through a glass window at my right hand, a gentleman close to me, standing with a pencil in one hand and a small sheet of ivory in the other, and his eyes directed to the opposite side of the room, as though he was taking some object on his ivory sheet. Dr. Clarkson did not see this man until he stepped into the room; but instantly turned about and came back, saying 'Mr. Peale is very busy taking the picture of something with his pencil. We will step back into the other room, and wait till he is at leisure.' We returned through the entry; but as we entered the room we met Mr. Peale coming to us. The doctor started back in astonishment, and cried out, 'Mr. Peale, how is it possible you should get out of the other room to meet us here?' Mr. Peale smiled and said, 'I have not been in the other room for some time.' 'No!' said Dr. Clarkson. 'Did I not see you there this moment with your pencil and ivory?' 'Why do you think you did?' asked Peale. 'Why do I think I did?' replied Dr. Clarkson. 'I saw you there if I ever saw you in my life.' 'Well,' says Peale, 'let us go and see.'

"When we returned we found the man standing as before. It was a piece of wax work which Mr. Peale had just finished, in which he had taken a

likeness of himself."<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, some measure of Charles Willson Peale's success at this illusionist enterprise may be inferred from an anecdote told by his son Rembrandt (1778-1860) about George Washington's encounter with The Staircase Group. Writing in the Crayon in 1856, Rembrandt recalled the first president's visit to Peale's Museum in 1797, and how he had "observed that Washington, as he passed, bowed politely to the painted figures which he afterwards acknowledged he thought were living persons."<sup>18</sup> In one respect, it is irrelevant whether this story is true and accurate or not; it indicates clearly Rembrandt's devotion to his father's memory, and the reverent courtesy he showed to the trompe l'oeil painting.

But immediately after this passage in his reminiscences, Rembrandt Peale adopted a critical rather than a personal approach, turning from anecdotes about Washington to a recollection of The Staircase Group by the American expatriate painter Charles Robert Leslie (1794-1859). Quoting from Leslie's A Hand-Book for Young Painters, just published in 1855, he presented the former Philadelphian's view at length.

"Children and childish minds are attracted by wonders. I remember, when I was a boy, seeing a picture that was placed against a wall at the end of a long room, representing an open door, through which a flight of stairs receded, with the figure of a man, of the size of life, as if walking up them. At the base of the canvas a real step projected on the floor of the room, and at a certain distance it was impossible to distinguish between the painted stairs and the wooden one; indeed, so complete was the deception, that on first seeing it my wonder was at the man's remaining stationary. This picture seemed to me perfection; and at that time I should probably have looked on the finest Titian with comparative indifference. It was, however, the work of a very ordinary painter."<sup>19</sup>

The emphases are Rembrandt's, and he naturally took exception to what he viewed as an unfair attack upon his father. What Rembrandt offered in response is not easily reconcilable with his Neoclassical leanings, and this uneasiness is expressed in the open-endedness of his reply. He wrote:

Whether Mr. Leslie, and others, are right in totally decrying all true representations of objects, as seen by the eye; and affirming that the best imitations of Nature are the worst pictures, leaving us to conclude that a charcoal sketch, inasmuch as it imitates nothing, is simply suggestive of something that may be imagined, though not seen, and must, therefore, be the perfection of Art, in the fancy of a theoretic amateur, is a question.

This comment is far from straightforward, and it may be that the contorted syntax was meant to mock what Rembrandt apparently viewed as Leslie's aesthetic snobbery. He concluded with a sort of taunt:

Yet he might have treated the friend of his father with a little more respect; for C. W. Peale, the author of that unpretending picture, though he could not rival the "Transfiguration" by Raphael, nor the "Duchess and Sancho Panza," by Leslie, was yet no very ordinary Painter, many of his portraits being equal to, and often mistaken for, those of his master, West.<sup>20</sup>

"Deception," used by Reynolds and Leslie (who had studied at the Royal Academy) to denigrate, was described by Rembrandt Peale, if somewhat defensively, with respect and even pride. Notwithstanding family ties, his respect for illusionistic skill represents a posture of the mind that lies conspicuously behind the motive for Charles Willson Peale's The Staircase Group and Raphaelle Peale's Deception. This point of view, as we have already seen, was often traced back to classical texts, and the best known of these texts was Book 35 of Pliny's Natural History.

Charles Willson Peale's lectures on natural history, presented in 1799-1800, are a mine of instances of his familiarity with Book 35.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, in

1823, when he was 82 years old, Charles Willson wrote letters to his sons Rubens (1784-1864) and Rembrandt in which he called upon lively impressions of Pliny's

Natural History. About plans for a painting, he wrote to Rubens:

I mean to make the whole piece a deception if I can. But I may be mistaken in my abilities, as of late I find it the case, instance, lectures on Natural History--The steps will certainly be a true illusion, and why not my figure? It is said that Apelles painted grapes so natural that the birds came to pick them, that he then painted a Boy to protect them, but the birds still came to take the grapes.<sup>22</sup>

Charles Willson referred again to the anecdote in a letter to Rembrandt, written on the same day:

I shall try my utmost to make the picture in all its parts a real deception; but like Apple's [sic], I may make the grapes to deceive the birds, but the painted boy was not natural enough to protect the grapes.<sup>23</sup>

The elder Peale's memory very nearly served him correctly: in point of fact the story (as told by Pliny in Book 35) is about Zeuxis, not Apelles. (The error might have gone without notice in the Peale family, for Rubens's older brother Rembrandt had made a comparable mistake in an article titled "Original Thoughts on Allegorical Painting," published in the National Gazette and Literary Register of Philadelphia in 1820; in this instance, Rembrandt ascribed to the worthy Apelles a work Pliny had attributed to Parrhasios.<sup>24</sup>) In any case, Charles Willson's statement represents clearly his belief that illusionistic technique was essential to painting and that deception was a worthy aim for art. In this opinion he reflects a climate in nineteenth-century America, corresponding to Pliny's outlook, in which the ability to produce an illusion of reality could serve as a measure of the artist's skill. This climate was to some degree present at the Columbianum twenty-eight years earlier; but if Peale's plan for

a trompe l'oeil painting in 1823 was conceived under an impulse at work in The Staircase Group, it was more immediately evocative of his son Raphaelle's Venus Rising from the Sea—A Deception (Fig. 5) which was exhibited at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1822.

It has been pointed out that the pose of Venus glimpsed behind the illusionistically painted cloth in Raphaelle Peale's work is taken from an engraving after the English artist James Barry's (1741-1806) Venus rising from the sea (1772; Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, Dublin).<sup>25</sup> In his painting Raphaelle not only made a courteous bow to Barry but to the classical age, for the subject of Barry's painting owes something to Pliny's brief references to Apelles's picture of Aphrodite Anadyomene or Aphrodite rising from the sea. Raphaelle may have been acquainted with the high praise bestowed upon Barry's Venus; he certainly would have known about the fragmentary references to Apelles's Aphrodite rising from the sea preserved in Book 35 of Pliny,<sup>26</sup> of which the rest of the Peale family (despite some errors on points of attribution) and their contemporaries seem to have been more than sufficiently aware. The renown of Apelles had figured prominently, for example, in a letter from "A Connoisseur" to the United States Gazette and True American (Philadelphia) of 12 October 1820. "Connoisseur" related several anecdotes about Apelles, all of which showed the writer's familiarity with Pliny.<sup>27</sup> Time and again the Roman author and the Greek painter appeared to nourish the imagination of Rembrandt Peale. In his Portfolio of an Artist, published in 1839, there are two passages drawn from the writings of Pliny, one of which refers to an unfinished

Venus by Apelles, and there is also a poem by Thomas Campbell entitled "Venus of Apelles."<sup>28</sup> Indeed, in an oft-quoted open letter, dated 1 December 1845, Rembrandt bore witness to the seminal role played by Pliny and Apelles in the evolution of his hugely successful painting The Court of Death (1820; Detroit Institute of Arts):

It was not an Allegorical Picture, composed after the examples of LEBRUN, or any School. I had read some remarks by Pliny on a style of painting which he recommended as capable of embodying thought, principle and character, without the aid of Conventional Allegory, and described one on these principles painted by Apelles, and approved by the Multitude. This picture of the Court of Death is an approach to that style.<sup>29</sup>

The effect of this admission is somewhat ironic. Rembrandt Peale conceived The Court of Death while in the grip of a European academic tradition that could trace its way back over 150 years to the lectures of André Félibien at the French Royal Academy.<sup>30</sup> From Félibien's time, through Reynolds at the Royal Academy in London 100 years later and onwards, historical painting, like Rembrandt Peale's The Court of Death, was accepted by artists and critics as the highest form of aesthetic achievement as opposed to still life which was ranked by them near the lowest. Fuseli expressed this aesthetic hierarchy, for example, in his previously cited criticism of Pliny. He started from the proposition that "in Pliny it is necessary, and for the artist not very difficult, to distinguish when he speaks from himself and when he delivers an extract." With respect to extracts, Fuseli evoked Pliny's comments on ideal conceptions like "the Jupiter of Phidias, the Doryphorus of Polycletus, the Aphrodite of Praxiteles, the Demus of Parrhasius, the Venus of Apelles." And with regard to personal views, he described Pliny's delight in humble concerns like

the cord drawn over the horns and muzzle of the bull in the group of Amphion,

Zetus, and Antiope; the spires and windings of the serpents in that of the Laocoon, the effect of the foam from the sponge of Protopogenes, the partridge in his Jalysus, the grapes that imposed on the birds, and the curtain which deceived Zeuxis.<sup>31</sup>

The Peale family, however, did not find it necessary to distinguish between Pliny "when he speaks from himself and when he delivers an extract." In the early 1820s, Pliny not only helped shape Rembrandt's "great moral picture" The Court of Death but, as we have already seen, he was present in Charles Willson Peale's account to son Rubens of plans for a "deception" and he lingered indirectly behind son Raphaele's Venus Rising from the Sea--A Deception.

Even before the 1820s, however, members of the Peale family saw no obstacles to an appreciation of Pliny's wide-ranging authority. If it was the "credulous" Pliny to whom Charles Willson Peale appealed in his letter to Rubens Peale in 1823 and in The Staircase Group in 1795, it was Pliny the venerable sage of antiquity to whom Charles Willson was first introduced. From the start of his professional training Peale was an artist intimately acquainted with Greco-Roman history and literature. When, in February 1767, Charles Willson arrived in London and entered the studio of the American expatriate Benjamin West (1738-1820), he was greeted by a host of classical stimuli. Although West never courted the classical tradition with single-minded devotion, Charles Willson found in his studio an air redolent of inspiration from a wide range of Roman writers, from Tacitus and Livy to Plutarch and Pliny. For example, in 1766, just prior to Peale's arrival, West executed a Paetus and Arria (Yale Center for British Art, New Haven), which was probably based on a story in Pliny's Letters. Over the next years, West painted

Pyrrhus when a Child, Brought before Glaucias (c. 1767; location unknown), from Plutarch's Life of Pyrrhus, Leonidas and Cleombrutus (1768; Tate Gallery, London), from Plutarch's Life of Agis, and Agrippina Landing at Brundisium with the Ashes of Germanicus (1768; Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven), a subject found in Tacitus's Annals. Shortly before Charles Willson's departure in March 1769, he is said to have posed for the figure of Regulus in West's painting of The Departure of Regulus from Rome (Her Majesty the Queen), a subject that could be found in the writings of Livy, among others.<sup>32</sup> It is hardly surprising, then, that in this antiquarian environment Peale would ennoble William the Pitt the Elder, the Earl of Chatham (whom West was to commemorate later in his Death of the Earl of Chatham [c. 1778; Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth]), by portraying him in Roman costume (1768; Westmoreland County Museum, Virginia).

Rembrandt Peale was also affected by the Neoclassical revivalism of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Soon after his return to Philadelphia from Paris in 1810 he commenced work on such classical themes as The Roman Daughter (1811; National Museum of American Art, Washington, D.C.), the literary source for which is Valerius Maximus.<sup>33</sup> In aspiring to the rank of history painter, Rembrandt could deny for himself the mimetic goal that he not only allowed for his father and brother, but later defended against Leslie's dismissive comments. And he could turn to Pliny, the classical source most closely identified with deception and imitation, with confident ease, and without finding it necessary to apologize for points of view "credulous, irrelevant, ludicrous," as Fuseli put it.

In this sense, Rembrandt Peale is part of an important and somewhat perplexing vein of American thought, of which Samuel F. B. Morse (1791-1872) was one of the grand proponents. Like Fuseli, Morse held that Pliny "was a better historian than connoisseur; his own opinion of works of art is of little value, but in his extracts . . . he gives the rules of the Greek artists, and has thus rescued from oblivion a small portion of real treasure to the Artist and man of Taste."<sup>34</sup> While Fuseli rebuked Pliny for the commonplace, materialistic thinking behind his appreciation of imitative art, Morse could go on to argue that imitation was a positive force, not a restraint. In the second of his lectures "On the Affinity of Painting with the Other Fine Arts," presented for the New York Athenaeum on 27 March 1826, Morse asked,

Is not Mechanical Imitation in Painting a necessary excellence through every step even to the highest grade of epic? I have allowed that it is, and to a greater than Sir Joshua Reynolds is disposed to admit. There is no reason why every thing that is selected to be represented should not be imitated exactly. In the epic, which is the highest class of Painting, the effect is produced by a more severe selection and rejection of objects, and parts of objects, but having made the selection, down to the minutest fold of drapery, I can perceive no reason why all that is should not be mechanically imitated with exactness.<sup>35</sup>

For Morse, the imitative or illusionistic aspects of painting were not to be denied in order that a work be understood as sufficiently elevated, as can be seen in his painting The Old House of Representatives (1822; Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.).

Despite these attempts to reconcile imitation and imagination, their utter separation was beginning to emerge. Some American critics insisted upon a system of values guided by the traditional hierarchy of themes, which made appeals to the

imaginative, as opposed to the imitative, faculty. The idea is reflected in T. Carlisle's article in Port-Folio of June 1812: "I have seen in Philadelphia, two very fine flower-pieces," he noted, "which however inferior this style of painting may be, are not to be despised as specimens of skilful execution."<sup>36</sup> And the writer and critic John Neal, in an art review for the American & Commercial Daily Advertiser (Baltimore) of 22 October 1822, turned his comments on a still life by Raphaelle Peale into a more general meditation on the hierarchy of thematic values.

. . . We are glad to repeat on the first occasion, what a man of good sense and taste lately said to us. He thinks that Mr. Raphael [sic] Peale is a master in his way, and that we have not said half enough in his praise. Be it so—Mr. Peale is a master in that department, but the department itself, we should remember, is only a subordinate one in the art.<sup>37</sup>

But the hierarchy of themes that took hold in the second quarter of the nineteenth century is best represented by Daniel Fanshaw's remarks in July 1827, in the United States Review and Literary Gazette:

The peculiar merit of this class of pictures consists in the exactness of the imitation. A single glance proves their success in this excellence; it is one that is always so striking, that most persons think it to be the great end and most difficult attainment of painting; this is a great mistake. It is not the only instance where minor excellences are exalted above greater. We can only observe, at present, that exactness of imitation is not the chief aim of painting, and that, although exceedingly fascinating, it ranks low when considered separate from other and higher qualities. The department we are considering, although it ranks thus low in the scale of works of art, has always been popular and for obvious reasons, that its chief merit is intelligible to all.<sup>38</sup>

Those critics who followed Fanshaw in proclaiming the priority of mind over matter also called upon the accepted hierarchy of themes. The critic for the North American Review of October 1831, for example, wrote approvingly of Washington Allston's (1779-1843) poetic Spanish Girl in Reverie (1831; Metropolitan Museum of

Art, New York) and Roman Lady Reading Tasso (c. 1831; Newark Museum, Newark, New Jersey). Although neither work approaches the dimension of historical painting, he could write that "the mind of the artist has endowed them with a portion of his own mind." "This emanation of mind," he continued, "is the true and only lasting criterion of greatness in the arts. It is all that elevates them above mere mechanical employments."<sup>39</sup> The writer then went on to say:

But, much as we rejoice in the progress of the Fine Arts, we confess we care comparatively little about the merely mechanical labor that is sometimes called by that name. We do not think the country would be much benefited or its character much elevated, if our artists could paint brass-kettles as well as Ostade, or dead game as well as Snyders. The painter who copies such things, is indeed likely to be somewhat more refined than the tinker or cook who handles the originals; but he is still further removed in an opposite direction from the artist, who endows with form and color the beautiful objects of his own invention, or embodies in portrait the intellect and character as well as the features of the face. We would not absolutely denounce what is called still-life painting, but we value it very lightly; and we protest against admitting among productions of the Fine Arts, those works, of which the whole supposed merit consists in an imitation of what is in itself entirely insignificant, and the highest aim of which is to produce a momentary deception.<sup>40</sup>

This attitude resounds in an article in the American Review of November 1843:

In each department there is every gradation of excellence from the sublimest manifestations of creative genius to the feeblest effort of mere imitation, each grade requiring a different order of powers for its production and appreciation. Ignorance of this fundamental principle of criticism to which we have alluded, is the source of a great and prevalent popular error, in relation to painting and sculpture--that of supposing "truth to nature" by which is meant fidelity of imitation, to be their chief aim and excellence. Whereas, although imitation enters largely into every design, and is in fact the substratum upon which every higher excellence depends, it is still only a subordinate attainment. "Deception," says Sir Joshua Reynolds, "instead of advancing the art, is in reality carrying it back to its infant state. The first essays of painting were certainly nothing but mere imitations of individual objects; and when this amounted to a deception, the artist had accomplished his purpose."<sup>41</sup>

For at least one section of the critical audience, then, convincing illusion

could be a secondary result of painting, but was unacceptable as its primary aim.

What these critics had in common, not only with each other but with their ideological predecessors across the Atlantic, was the view that illusionistic painting, such as deceptive still life, was a trivial pictorial mode devoid of moral or ideal significance. Such critics helped establish a tradition in America in which artistic merit was judged by its most far-reaching separation from "mere imitation."

At the same time, however, mimetic qualities seemed to less high-minded observers the measure of artistic skill. Such advocates for deception's virtues could argue not from its place in the accepted hierarchy of painting, but from its popular appeal and ultimately its venerable place in antiquity. For example, when the paintings in Peale's Museum were sent to auction in 1854, the catalogue advertised Charles Willson Peale's The Staircase Group by noting:

All who have visited PEALE'S MUSEUM recollect this remarkable painting; its perfect truth to nature is such, that many people have been deceived into the belief that it was a real staircase, with persons ascending it. It was not unusual for persons to approach it, and place one foot on the first step, which was a real one, and dogs have been known to run against it, in the attempt to ascend it.<sup>42</sup>

This reflects back on a tale told about the Philadelphian John A. Woodside (1781-1852), in which his depiction of fish, game and meat on a shop sign was so striking that a dog leaped for the painted display and hit its nose.<sup>43</sup> As it happens, this praise of the artist's prowess, this jest at the expense of animals, echoes through a story told about William Harnett's now-lost painting Side Spring Lamb, done in Munich in 1882. A commentary in the catalogue of the sale of Harnett's effects remarked on the painting as follows:

It is said that this painting was the cause of a serious accident, . . . Whilst putting the finishing touches upon it a gentleman friend called upon him, accompanied by a large mastiff, which, being persuaded that the leg of lamb was genuine, made one grand rush for--a good dinner; this upset the easel, which fell against the table on which were the models; and hence the accident.<sup>44</sup>

This casting of members of the animal kingdom as unconscious victims of the artist's technical virtuosity is, of course, a clear extension of the classical legend of Zeuxis duping the birds, and would have served to remind any contemporary audience of Pliny's account of the competition between Zeuxis and Parrhasios.

Pliny's story, not without appeal to earlier generations, comes up again and again in the second half of the nineteenth century, and is found in both popular and learned literature. The ancient theme was addressed by William Smith in A History of Greece in 1855, and George Whitefield Samson in Elements of Art Criticism in 1867. And it abounded in the late nineteenth century in assorted studies of art history, including a Miss Ludlow's A General View of the Fine Arts, Critical and Historical (New York, 1851), with an introduction by Daniel Huntington (1816-1906), the painter and future president of the National Academy of Design, Kazlitt Arvine's Cyclopedia of Anecdotes of Literature and the Fine Arts (Boston, 1852), Wilhelm Lübke's Outlines of the History of Art (New York, 1869), as edited by Clarence Cook, Mary Heaton's A Concise History of Art (London, 1872), Nancy D'Anvers's Elementary History of Art (New York, 1875), Alida Radcliffe's Schools and Masters of Painting (New York, 1876), Louis Viardot's An Illustrated History of Painters of All Schools (London and Philadelphia, 1877), Phillip Sandhurst's The Table Book of Art; A History of Art in All Countries and Ages (New York, 1880), Alfred

Wolfmann and Karl Wörmann's History of Ancient, Early Christian, and Medieval Painting (New York, 1880), and Franz von Reber's History of Ancient Art (New York, 1882). And it was, of course, employed in The Boys' and Girls' Pliny, being Parts of Pliny's "Natural History", published in 1885.<sup>45</sup> As if to confirm the impact of these or similar texts, the New York Star of 30 December 1885, carried an article under the heading "Art's Counterfeiting" which painted a vivid and commendatory picture of Harnett's After the Hunt (Fig. 6). It began:

Everybody is familiar with the story of the contest between two Athenian painters for the palm of supremacy in the close imitation of objects. One painted a girl bearing a basket of grapes, and the fruit was so natural that the birds came and pecked at it. The other presented a framed picture over which hung a cloth. His rival hastily snatched at the cloth to see what was behind it, and found that it was painted, a mock counterfeit. He acknowledged himself vanquished, saying, "I only deceive birds, but you have deceived a painter."<sup>46</sup>

In 1884, a German newspaper used the same approach: "Everyone knows the tale of Zeuxis and Parrhasios," it held. "W. Harnett might, not unjustifiably, be called a true modern Parrhasios, deceiving people with the still life of his which is exhibited this week at the Kunstverein."<sup>47</sup>

Indeed, Louisa Trumbull Cogswell, paying respects to Harnett in Arcadia on 1 December 1892, recalled how

In our school-days we used to read with admiration the story of the contest between the Athenian painters: how Zeuxis having depicted a bunch of grapes so cunningly that the birds pecked at them challenged Parrhasius to draw aside the curtain from his picture, and then discovered that he himself had been deceived by his rival's drapery.

She then provided another clear exposition, previously cited, of the connection between Harnett and those ancient rivals: "The late W. M. Harnett, of New York,

was a worthy successor of the celebrated Grecians in his ability to represent inanimate objects with such fidelity as to produce an effect of reality."<sup>48</sup> The point is not merely that Pliny's story of Zeuxis and Parrhasios echoed more than faintly through the late nineteenth century, but that the conflicting system of values that had guided the attitudes of earlier generations was still very much in place. Katherine Metcalf Roof, for example, a pupil of Harnett's contemporary, William Merritt Chase (1849-1916), could "remember well the harassed frown with which he used to say to his students: 'You have all heard of the picture of the fruit which was so natural that the birds flew down to peck at it? I do not need to see that canvas to know that it was a Terrible Thing!'"<sup>49</sup> And thus, a critic like Cogswell, writing only a month after the artist's death, was concerned to remind the reader that Harnett's painting, "is not, indeed, the highest form of art, but it is nevertheless a popular one."<sup>50</sup>

That state of mind was hard at work in the review of the National Academy of Design exhibition in the New-York Daily Tribune of 26 April 1879, discussed earlier. The writer, presumably Clarence Cook, argued:

Only a very few artists of merit . . . among them Vollon, of our own time, have occasionally wreaked their superfluous strength and sportive leisure on the painting [of] pots and pans so sublimely as almost to make us ashamed of our principles. . . . [But] the exquisite works of a Blaise Desgoffe, a Steinheil or a Benedictus ought not to make us forget that their pictures are to true art what a catch or a glee is to true music.<sup>51</sup>

Aside from reiterating the traditional hierarchy of thematic values, the critic's juxtaposition of Antoine Vollon and Blaise Desgoffe (1830-1901) calls to mind similar arguments by other contemporary observers. In 1883, for example, the American artist Kenyon Cox (1856-1919) wrote about a Vollon painting that "There is no

attempt to realize it. There is no painful study of minutiae, detail by detail, as Desgoffe would have painted it."<sup>52</sup> Similarly, in A History of French Painting, published in 1888, Clara Stranahan discussed Desgoffes's mastery of "all excellences of exact reproduction." Then, to show that such considerations only reaffirm the low status of this branch of still-life painting, she invoked the restorative example of Vollon:

Desgoffe does not go beyond imitation, while Vollon, a pupil of Ribot, in treating, with somewhat of the feeling of Chardin, the more homely objects of still life, has not only come more closely to the hearts of his public but his public is the public of the connoisseurs who care not for any tricks of "trompe l'oeil," but for art.<sup>53</sup>

This critical attitude toward the separation between the two painters was reaffirmed in the twentieth century by Arthur Edwin Bye. In his seminal study of still-life painting, Pots and Pans of 1921, Bye observed that a Desgoffe picture of elegant sixteenth-century bric-a-brac "is not worth a kettle by Antoine Vollon--perfect imitation of the objects that it is." Bye was more artful, perhaps, but no less dismissive of trompe l'oeil still life when he chimed: "Desgoffe--how thankful too, we are of thee--example as thou of all that still-life painting never ought to be!"<sup>54</sup> It was precisely because of the imitative aspect of Desgoffe's art, and the aesthetic values inferred behind it, that unflattering parallels could be drawn between his trompe l'oeil paintings and those of Harnett.

What these critics held forth as primarily a matter of aesthetic consideration was for other observers something very like a moral imperative. The Reverend Frederick Taylor Gates, for example, in a sermon delivered before the

Central Baptist Church in Minneapolis on 11 September 1887, rejected the trompe l'oeil style of Harnett's The Old Violin of 1886 (Collection of James H. Maroney) quite unequivocally. For him, like the art critic for the New-York Daily Tribune, "mere accuracy and vividness of delineation is of minor consideration in estimating the true worth of a picture." But in remarks stimulated by the exhibition of pictures in the Art Galleries of the Minneapolis Industrial Exposition, Gates went on to describe some additional concerns of his own:

The delineation is perfect, the deception complete. And yet that picture is a specimen of the humblest function of the art of painting. The picture conveys no worthy thought or emotion. It is simply a trick. The thought in the mind of the artist is simply, 'Only see how I can deceive you.' 'Just see me do it.' There is nothing whatever in the picture to please or instruct or elevate you. It is nothing but an anonymous old fiddle. The purpose of the painting is just nothing else in the world than to make you admire the man who could depict so vividly. All the accessories of the picture--the rusty hinges, the cracks in the board, the ring and staple, the tacks, the printed slip, the crumpled envelope--are arranged with the single design of rendering the ocular deception perfect. The picture is unworthy, because its purpose is low and selfish. It is a mere piece of legerdemain.

Certainly, there was little appeal in The Old Violin for an observer, like Gates, who fervently believed that "the most worthwhile class of pictures of all [are] those which exert a directly spiritual influence." (As an example of this class of picture he cited a small copy of a painting of Christ Before Pilate shown in the Italian room of the Exposition.) Not only was Harnett's trompe l'oeil style to be held in contempt, but his choice of subject evidenced a want of those outward signs which, to Gates's eye, "convey truth, or touch our feelings, or broaden our sympathies, or warn us, or stimulate to better work, or elevate our ideals of life or call out devotional feeling." "Such pictures," he concluded, "bless the home, ennoble life and glorify God."<sup>55</sup>

To be sure, the Reverend Gates held works of art up to loftier standards than most, scarcely surprising in the pastor of the Central Baptist Church of Minneapolis, Minnesota. Although greater authority was to be given in aesthetic matters to the views of a critic and painter like Samuel G. W. Benjamin (1837-1914), Gates and Benjamin agreed on the importance of a moral dimension in art. In What is Art, or Art Theories and Methods Concisely Stated, published in 1877, Benjamin offered this capsulized prescription: "To suggest ideas, to quicken the imagination, to touch the secret spring which moves the emotion, and thus to please, to influence, to educate and to elevate, this is the highest province of art."<sup>56</sup> Although Benjamin did not see illusionist skill operating to the utter exclusion of moral aims, as did Gates, he nevertheless felt that "No mere technical excellences can make up for the absence of the ideal in a work of art."<sup>57</sup> Thus did Benjamin declare about the paintings of John La Farge (1835-1910) in Art in America: A Critical and Historical Sketch, published in 1880, that "the various elements of art are regarded by La Farge not so much for what they are as for what they suggest; he is less concerned with the external than with the hidden meaning it has for the soul."<sup>58</sup>

In contrast to Gates's largely idiosyncratic view, the idea of a spiritualized mode of artistic expression that took hold more generally in the late nineteenth century is represented by Benjamin's further remarks on La Farge:

It is because of his subtle way of regarding the beauty of this world that he has given us such thoughtful landscapes as "Paradise at Newport," and such exquisitely painted flowers, . . . rendered with a tender harmony of color that thrills us like a lyric of Keats or of Tennyson. It is this serious, reflective turn which has given a religious hue to his art.<sup>59</sup>

For Benjamin, La Farge's refined aesthetic sensibility opened to the viewer a lyrical world of deep feeling, a world where even softly-painted flower pictures were imbued with a religious tone.

In the same way, Mariana Griswold van Rensselaer commended La Farge's paintings in the Church of the Incarnation in an 1886 article in the *New York Star*, seeing in them spiritual and poetic possibilities:

We instantly feel here--sentiment as pure and genuine (if less naif and unconscious) and as reverently Christian as could have been expressed in the work of a time far more emotional and more religious in its general mood than ours. Merely as a proof of the fact that religious art is not a dead art, that it may still live otherwise than in the galvanized, materialistic, prosaic, soulless imitations we are used to seeing on the walls of the Paris Salon.

Van Rensselaer added that La Farge's style was "as far from being realistic as the theme. It is distinctly poetic and impassioned, the very vagueness of the drawing contributing, perhaps, a certain share of this effect." Indeed, only a moment earlier she had noted that,

The first thing which a critic's conscience obliges him to notice in speaking of these pictures is certainly not the first thing which impresses him when seeing them--the weakness or carelessness of the drawing. It is singular, indeed, how little this strikes us at first sight and how little, moreover, we are hurt by its existence even when examination has revealed it.<sup>60</sup>

This image of La Farge can be found earlier in *The Art-Idea*, written by James Jackson Jarves, and first published in 1864. In praising the flower paintings of La Farge, Jarves, who was a devotee of spiritualism,<sup>61</sup> rejected works that drew on realistic effects as opposed to spiritual or poetic ones. Writing from this perspective, he presented an example of what was to become a dogma of advanced criticism: the schism between "the realists and idealists." Comparing La Farge's paintings of

flowers with George Henry Hall's (1825-1913) paintings of fruit, Jarves declared:

Aside from exact imitation Hall's work is the most barren of art. As Hinckley paints animals with the animal left out, so painters of horticulture like Hall exhaust their art on the outside of things, with the fidelity of workers in wax. The more natural, the greater the lie, because they try not for a type or suggestion, but for actual deception. An untrained eye may be deceived, but such success is positive condemnation. Art has fallen into the low condition of artifice. Sooner or later the mind detects the subterfuge, outgrows its juvenile liking, and the sham becomes to it stale and wearisome. Who thinks of the horticulturist, or pauses to taste, weigh, or price flowers and fruit painted as La Farge paints them?

He congratulated La Farge whose violets and lilies, he felt, were "as tender and true suggestions of flowers--not copies--as nature ever grew, and affect our senses in the same delightful way." And he anticipated the high-minded comments of critics and observers such as Benjamin, Van Rensselaer, and Gates in his commitment to the idea of the moralism: of stylistic effects.

Their language is of the heart and they talk to us of human love and God's goodness. Hall's fruit is round, solid, juicy--huckster's fruit; only it proclaims paint and painter too loudly to tantalize the stomach. The violets of La Farge, and, indeed his landscape entire, quiver with poetical fire. We bear away from the sight of them, in our inmost souls, new and joyful utterances of nature.<sup>62</sup>

In comparison, George Henry Hall's style, like Harnett's, was considered materialistic. Whether or not Harnett's paintings were "soulless imitations," as the advanced critics might have argued, or his purpose "low and selfish," as Gates had charged, Harnett did, in fact, capture the attention of critics and spectators with his ability to render the nuances of the physical world. And it was this quality that gave the work of artists like Hall and Harnett its popular appeal.

This side of critical opinion is best exemplified by Mark Twain's observations on the exhibition at the National Academy of Design in the spring of

1867. "I am thankful that the good God creates us all ignorant," Twain wrote in dispatch to the San Francisco Alta California, "I am glad that when we change His plans in this regard, we have to do it at our own risk. It is a gratification to me to know that I am ignorant of art."<sup>63</sup> Taking aim at the critical gaze of professionals like Jarves, he continued:

The art critics have been so diligently abusing everything in and about the Academy of Design, for weeks past, that I was satisfied that a visit there could produce nothing but unhappiness. I wandered into the place by accident to-day, however, and staid [sic] there three hours. I could have staid [sic] a week. I was not cultivated enough to see the dreadful faults that were so glaring to others' eyes.<sup>64</sup>

Although Twain dismissed "the usual endless array of vases and dishes full of grapes and peaches and slices of watermelon, and such stuff," he enjoyed "a dreamy tropical scene" (probably Martin Johnson Heade's Lagoon, in Nicaragua) and a couple of genre pictures, one of which represented intoxicated squirrels (most likely William Holbrook Beard's The Hunter's Flask).<sup>65</sup> Twain's appreciation of the visual dimension in art, of an art placed squarely in the realm of the literal, is marked even more clearly in a later dispatch to the Alta California in which he described Albert Bierstadt's (1830-1902) The Domes of the Yosemite (1867; St. Johnsbury Athenaeum, St. Johnsbury, Vermont).

Now, to sum up the picture's merits, those snow-peaks are correct--they look natural; the valley is correct and natural; the pine trees clinging to the bluff on the right, and the grove on the left, and the boulders, are all like nature; we will assume that the domes and things are drawn accurately.<sup>66</sup>

The sort of realism that contributed to Twain's taste for The Domes of the Yosemite was devoured by the average viewer. So much was this the case that the

Reverend Gates, in his disparaging comments on Harnett's The Old Violin, was obliged to acknowledge the painting's realistic effect. "You will have to look long and closely and from different angles," he said, "to assure yourself that this is a painting at all, and not a real violin hung on a pair of old wooden shutters with a broken hinge." Indeed, he noted, "in Philadelphia they employed a policeman to keep people from trying to settle the matter by putting their hands on it. Here the frame is set in a glass case."<sup>67</sup> While his point of view was censorious, it is perfectly clear that Gates had no doubts about Harnett's ability to fool the eye of the spectator, nor that he believed this entailed a base, manipulative playing upon the senses. Moreover, it is clear that Gates's aside was meant to censure the vulgar appeal that Harnett's work held for viewers in a host of cities, ranging from Philadelphia and Minneapolis to New York and Cincinnati.

When The Old Violin was exhibited at the Cincinnati Exposition in 1886, for example, the Cincinnati Enquirer for 19 September stated that "it is a fact that an officer had to be placed on duty behind the rail to keep inquisitive and skeptical spectators from attempting the removal of the newspaper scrap with their finger-nails."<sup>68</sup> Three days earlier, the Cincinnati Commercial Gazette likewise reported that The Old Violin looked "so real" that "one of Captain Wise's specials has been detailed to stand beside the picture and suppress any attempts to take down the fiddle and bow." Even the religious slant of Gates's comments on Harnett were somewhat blasphemously mirrored by the Commercial Gazette writer's confession that he,

being one of those doubting Thomases who are by no means disposed to believe their own eyes, was permitted to allay his conscientious scruples by feeling it, and is prepared to kiss the book, and s'help me, it is painted. Mr. Hartnett [sic] . . . takes a wicked delight in defying the possibilities.<sup>69</sup>

These anecdotes also resemble stories reported by the press in New York, where Theodore Stewart's celebrated saloon provided the setting for a slew of tributes to Harnett's After the Hunt. The painting was purchased by Stewart for his Warren Street bar in 1885, sometime after its exhibition at the Paris Salon in the spring of that year. It was installed in Stewart's bar before the end of the year, commanding attention and attracting visitors. The New York Star, for example, echoed the Cincinnati newspapers's delight in the spectacle of Harnett's illusionistic style.

According to the Star on 30 December 1885:

Men come and stand before this picture for fifteen minutes at a time, and the remarks passed upon it are curious indeed. As a rule, city men are enraptured with it, and go into ecstasies over the feathery plumage of the birds and the furry coat of the rabbit, over the wonderful representation of the butt end of an old snap-lock gun, over the extraordinary imitation of the brass work of the horn.<sup>70</sup>

Here as elsewhere, the air of skepticism that hung about the site of Harnett's paintings was a familiar theme of discussion. The Star on 7 January 1886 observed that "hundreds of prominent citizens--artists, journalists, judges, lawyers, men about town and actors--visit this wonderful work of art daiiy and wildy wager and express opinions as to its being an optical illusion or a real painting."<sup>71</sup> Even those members of the New York audience who were tricked by the painting could find compensation in Harnett's ability to fool the uninitiated "from Missouri." Or better still, from Chicago. This lengthy anecdote was twice invoked by the Star, with an element of

civic pride and chauvinism, and even appeared in the London Commercial Gazette:

Gentlemen from the country, and especially from Chicago, who see it for the first time, declare that nobody can take them in, and that the objects are real objects hung up with an intent to deceive people. A drummer from the city of sin was very angry over the obvious imposition, and wagered \$5 that the thing was not a painting. "Feel it," said his friend. He felt it, and found that it was a flat panel. "Well," he said, "I admit that the rabbit and the birds are painted. I ought to have seen that from the first, because, although they are wonderfully lifelike, there is a sort of yielding of the muscles in a dead thing which you don't [sic] see in this. But what got me was the hanging up of that bottle, because I could see in a moment that the string was real." The crowd behind them burst into a roar of laughter, and the drummer made a dash for the bottle; but his hands met only the flat surface of a panel. He was dumbfounded. "Gee whittakers!" at last broke from his lips; "that beats Chicago--hang me if it doesn't! I understand it now. It's all painted, frame and all, and that's what makes the illusion so perfect." There was another roar from the crowd that taking in the scene with huge delight. The man dashed at the frame, but this time found solid wood. The frame was not painted.

The Star reported further that "one Western man wickedly stuck his cane into the painting and slightly damaged it, fortunately not injuring it. He was unceremoniously shown out the door, with the request never to enter the place again."<sup>72</sup> Although the tone of these accounts are comic, an obituary published in the New York World on 1 November 1892, noted that Stewart's collection of Harnett still lifes "look so natural that it was found necessary to place a sign at the foot of the railing surrounding the pictures, 'This is a painting; do not poke at it with canes.'<sup>73</sup> This is probably more than just a time-honored conceit; it seems fitting to point out that when Harnett's Old Models (Fig. 7) was shown in 1949 at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., Time magazine reported that "more than one visitor absently tried to flick the dust off its violin."<sup>74</sup> And when the exhibition A New World: Masterpieces of American Painting was installed at the Corcoran Gallery in the winter of 1983-84, the

museum took the precaution of placing a sign in the room with trompe l'oeil paintings by Harnett and John Haberle (1853-1933) to deter visitors from fingering the works.<sup>75</sup>

Given the elemental appeal of Harnett's painting, it is not surprising that his realistic means were endorsed by the British painter and writer John Collier (1850-1934) in A Primer of Art, published in 1882. In the primer, Collier made some effort to redress the balance in the critical evaluation of realist art, and it is pertinent to cite him at length.

It is sometimes objected that the mere imitation of nature is a base and degraded aim—that art should soar high above all vulgar realism—that what is valuable in a picture is the insight into the mind of the artist, and so on, and so on. Now be it observed that I have said nothing of the imitation of nature being the sole or even the highest aim of art; but it is one aim, and that a most important and legitimate one; indeed, it is so important that the highest art is impossible without it. . . . It is also obvious that it is impossible to acquire the power of imitation without constant practice, so that realism at the worst is an indispensable step towards the highest forms of painting. But it is much more than this with the vast majority of artists, it is not a step towards something higher, but the goal itself to which their efforts should tend. . . . These truisms are so obvious that I should be ashamed to write them were it not for the discouragement that is continually shown to those earnest students who think that nature is more beautiful and more worthy to be recorded than their own imaginings.<sup>76</sup>

As if to defend realist artists, as well as the aesthetic standards of the public at large, Collier wrote:

When all is said and done, when the student has laboriously conquered all the technical difficulties that beset his path, and has at last acquired the power of giving a faithful transcript of nature, it will perhaps be scornfully asked, 'What has he gained after all?' He has become at best a superior kind of photographer, but he is certainly unworthy of the name of artist. Where is the imagination, where is the poetry, where are all the finer feelings that alone make art valuable?' To which I reply, firstly, that a superior photographer is a very useful and admirable person. That even an inferior photographer can make us acquainted with the beauty of the world we live in, and that is a work of which any man may be proud.

At the end of this passage Collier implicated Henry Fuseli (whose snide put-down of Pliny and imitation has already been cited) by name, observing acidly that realism is "much better indeed than the work done by a painter like Fuseli, who mistook the dreams caused by a disordered digestion for the promptings of the imagination. A mistake that I fancy has not been uncommon in the history of art."<sup>77</sup>

One need only glance at the review of the Royal Academy exhibition in the Times of London on 25 May 1885, to know that Collier was not alone in his matter-of-fact tastes. Almost a hundred years after Sir Joshua Reynolds condemned "the vulgar idea of imitation" in a discourse before the Royal Academy, a still life there by Harnett was favorably (and without a hint of sarcasm) described by the Times as "one of the most miraculous representations of books, a flute, some sheets of music, and a brass lamp that we have ever seen."<sup>78</sup> Certainly, what Harnett's friend Edward Taylor Snow said in this regard may be taken as wholly admiring. In an essay written not long after the artist's death, Snow remarked: "Mr. Harnett through hard study and years of toil achieved for himself the highest fame in his line of painting, being recognized as the most realistic painter of this age."<sup>79</sup>

Contemporary discussions of Harnett's pictures, then, whether in praise or disapproval, were stricken with endless debate over the aesthetic conflict between realism and idealism. The conflict between these two views, which polarized and interacted throughout the nineteenth century, is an important one for the study of Harnett. Historically, it represents a traditional choice between contemplating a work of art either as a mirror of the world or as a reflection of the mind, and it reveals

certain nineteenth-century habits of thought which minimized all but the most elementary aspects of Harnett's subject matter. In this, iconography and meaning played an almost unnoticed part.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Wolfgang Born, "William M. Harnett: Bachelor Artist," Magazine of Art 39, no. 6 (October 1946), 253; and Wolfgang Born, Still-Life Painting in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), 33.

<sup>2</sup>Alfred Frankenstein, After the Hunt: William Harnett and Other American Still Life Painters 1870-1900, rev. ed. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1968), 21.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>4</sup>Harnett's strong interest in the vanitas theme has been the subject of several recent studies: Barbara S. Groseclose presented a paper on "Vanity and the Artist: Some Still-Life Paintings of William Michael Harnett," at the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute in November 1983 and published her comments under the same title in the American Art Journal 19, no. 1 (1987), 51-59. The present author delivered a paper entitled "William Michael Harnett's The Old Cupboard Door: An Iconographic Interpretation," at the annual meeting of the College Art Association, Los Angeles, 1985. A revised version of this paper was published under the title "William Michael Harnett's The Old Cupboard Door and the Tradition of Vanitas," in the American Art Journal 18, no. 3 (1986), 51-62. The present author also published an iconographic interpretation of Harnett's A Study Table in Masterworks of American Art from the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1989), 84-85, 223-24, and presented a paper on "'For my days are consumed like smoke': William Michael Harnett's The Social Club and the Theme of Vanitas" at the annual meeting of the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, 1991. A fair number of essays take up the question of symbolic meaning in Harnett's art in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition William M. Harnett, ed. Doreen Bolger, Marc Simpson, and John Wilmerding (Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas, and Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992). See Roxana Robinson, "Common Objects of Everyday Life," 162-66; Jennifer Hardin, "The Late Years," 185-89; Thayer Tolies Mickel, "Permanent Perishables: The Artist's Fruit Paintings," 214, 216; the present author's "Grave Counsel: Harnett and Vanitas," 253-61; Judy L. Larson, "Literary References in Harnett's Still-Life Paintings," 265-73; and Marc Simpson, "Harnett and Music: Many a Touching Melody," 290-91.

<sup>5</sup>Louisa Trumbull Cogswell, "Art in Boston," Arcadia 1, no. 15 (December 1, 1892), 306.

<sup>6</sup>Pliny the Elder, The Elder Pliny's Chapters on the History of Art, trans. K. Jex-Blake (1896; reprint ed., Chicago: Argonaut, Publishers, 1968), 109, 111.

<sup>7</sup>Cook reported the title of Sargent's painting as Little Wanton Boys, but the work is found in the Catalogue of the Fifty-Fourth Annual Exhibition of the National Academy of Design, 1879 (New York), 25, no. 431 as Neapolitan Children Bathing. William Howe Downes listed in his John Singer Sargent, His Life and Work (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1925), 122, a Neapolitan Children Bathing, noting that it was "Painted in 1879, but it does not appear to have been shown at the Salon of that year."

Heade's painting is listed in the Catalogue of the Fifty-Fourth Annual Exhibition, 25, no. 429 as Tropical Flowers, but information that would identify the work further was not given either in the catalogue or in Cook's review.

<sup>8</sup>[Clarence Cook], "Academy of Design; Fifty-Fourth Annual Exhibition; Fourth Article," New-York Daily Tribune 26 April 1879, 5.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Sir Joshua Reynolds, Discourses on Art, ed. Robert R. Wark (San Marino, Cal.: Huntington Library, 1959), 232-33.

<sup>11</sup>John Knowles, ed., The Life and Writings of Henry Fuseli, Esq. M.A. R.A., vol. 2 (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1831), 3.

<sup>12</sup>John Smythe Memes, History of Sculpture, Painting, and Architecture (Boston: Clapp and Broaders, 1834), 127-28.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>14</sup>John Opie, Lectures on Painting, Delivered at the Royal Academy of Arts (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, 1809), 106-07.

<sup>15</sup>There is some confusion about the exact number of works shown at the Columbianum exhibition, and, in turn, the exact number of still lifes. The catalogue of The Exhibition of the Columbianum, or American Academy of Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, &c. (Philadelphia, 1795) lists 133 original entries and 4 more that were added later by hand. By isolating multiple works under single entries, a combined total may be assembled that amounts to 170 works, of which 29 appear to be still life: 7. A May rose in enamel, . . . ; 24. Still Life painted by Mr. Bigg, . . . ; 25. Four Fruit Pieces by Mr. Copeley, of Boston; 26. A Wood Duck, Still Life, by ditto; 38. A Fruit Piece, (still life) by Gower; 39. Ditto, by a Pupil of Gower; 52. A Deception; 53. Ditto; 54. Ditto; 55. Flowers on the back of Glass; 56. Five Flower pieces, in imitation of Enamel; 70. Fruit; 76. A Shad; 77. Herrings; 78. Small fish; 79. A covered Painting; 80. Still Life; 81. Still Life; 82. A Bill; 83. Deception; 130. Ribs of Beef; 131. Fruit.

<sup>16</sup>Nos. 595. Flowers, Miss M. Byrne; 632. Flowers, Miss M. Byrne; 634. Flowers, Miss M. Byrne; 723. Flowers, M. Lawrence.

<sup>17</sup>J. Thomas Scharf and Thompson Westcott, History of Philadelphia, 1609-1884, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: L. H. Everts & Co., 1884), 946.

It is safe to assume that Peale's waxwork figure predates The Staircase Group, for the same account mentions that the Reverend Cutler "visited the museum while it was still at Third and Lombard Streets," that is, sometime between 1784 and 1794.

<sup>18</sup>Rembrandt Peale, "Reminiscences; The Person and Mien of Washington," Crayon 3, part 3 (April 1856), 100.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.* For the source of Peale's quotation see C[harles] R[obert] Leslie, A Hand-Book for Young Painters (London: John Murray, 1855), 3.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup>Dorinda Evans, "Raphaelle Peale's Venus Rising From The Sea: Further Support for a Change of Interpretation," American Art Journal 14, no. 3 (Summer 1982), 69, n. 17.

<sup>22</sup>Charles Willson Peale to Rubens Peale, 5 August 1823, in The collected letters of Charles Willson Peale and his family, ed. Lillian B. Miller (Millwood, N. Y.: KTO Microform, Kraus Thomson, 1980), series II-A, card no. 69.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.* This passage is also quoted in Evans, 69.

<sup>24</sup>Rembrandt Peale, "Original Thoughts on Allegorical Painting," National Gazette and Literary Register 28 October 1820, 4.

<sup>25</sup>Evans, catalogue entry on After the Bath in Philadelphia: Three Centuries of American Art (Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1976), 257.

<sup>26</sup>Pliny, Pliny's Chapters on the History of Art, 127, 129.

<sup>27</sup>A Connoisseur, "For the Union," United States Gazette and True American 12 October 1820, 2.

<sup>28</sup>Rembrandt Peale, Portfolio of an Artist (Philadelphia: Henry Perkins, 1839), 171; *ibid.*, 22.

<sup>29</sup>The open letter appears under the heading "History of the Painting" in Peale's Court of Death (n.p., c. 1845), 5.

<sup>30</sup>For a discussion of Félibien and the hierarchy of artistic themes see William H. Gerdts, Painters of the Humble Truth: Masterpieces of American Still Life 1801-1839 (Columbia, Mo. & London: Philbrook Art Center with University of Missouri Press, 1981), 21-22.

<sup>31</sup>Fuseli, *ibid.*, 3-4.

<sup>32</sup>For the source of Paetus and Arria see Pliny Letters 3:16; for Pyrrhus when a Child . . . see Plutarch Life of Pyrrhus, Loeb Classical Library, 351-53; for Leonidas and Cleombrutus see Plutarch Life of Agis, Loeb Classical Library, 39; for Agrippina Landing at Brundisium . . . see Tacitus Annals 3:1-2; for The Departure of Regulus from Rome see Livy 18, Loeb Classical Library, 556-57.

<sup>33</sup>Valerius Maximus Factorum et Dictorum Memorabilium 9:4.

<sup>34</sup>Quoted in Samuel F. B. Morse, Lectures on the Affinity of Painting with the Other Fine Arts, ed. Nicolai Cikovsky, Jr. (Columbia, Mo. & London: University of Missouri Press, 1983), 127

<sup>35</sup>"Lecture 2," in *ibid.*, 61.

<sup>36</sup>T. Carlisle, "Remarks on Various Objects of the Fine Arts," Port-Folio 7, no. 6 (June 1812), 539.

<sup>37</sup>"Review of the Annual Exhibition, &c. Baltimore, 1822--No. VII," American & Commercial Daily Advertiser 22 October 1822, 2.

<sup>38</sup>Daniel Fanshaw, "The Exhibition of the National Academy of Design," United States Review and Literary Gazette 2, no. 4 (July 1827), 258.

<sup>39</sup>"Exhibition of Pictures at the Athenaeum Gallery," North American Review 33, no. 73 (October 1831), 510.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 512.

<sup>41</sup>"Tendency of the Fine Arts," American Review, and Metropolitan Magazine 1, no. 6 (November 1843), 490.

<sup>42</sup>Peale's Museum Gallery of Oil Paintings (Philadelphia, M. Thomas & Sons, Auctioneers, 1854), 6, no. 100.

<sup>43</sup>This anecdote is found in Virgil Barker, American Painting, History and Interpretation (New York: Macmillan Co., 1950) 372.

<sup>44</sup>Executrix's Sale Catalogue of Exquisite Examples in Still Life being Oil Paintings By the Late William Michael Harnett, including the Furnishings of his Studio (Philadelphia, Thomas Birch's Sons, Auctioneers, February 23-24, 1893), 7, no. 31.

<sup>45</sup>William Smith, A History of Greece, from the Earliest Times to the Roman Conquest with Supplementary chapters on the History of Literature and Art (Boston: Hickling, Swan, and Brown, 1855), 365; [Miss Ludlow (possibly Anna Douglas Ludlow)], A General View of the Fine Arts, Critical and Historical, intro. D[aniel] Huntington (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1851), 57-58; G[eorge] W[hitehurst] Samson, Elements of Art Criticism (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1867), 289; Kazlitt Arvine, Cyclopedia of Anecdotes of Literature and the Fine Arts (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1852), 528; Wilhelm Lübke, Outlines of the History of Art, trans. Clarence Cook, vol. 1 (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1878), 248; Mrs. C. Heaton [Mary Margaret], A Concise History of Art (London: Bell and Daldy, 1872), 19; Nancy D'Anvers, Elementary History of Art (New York: Scribner, Welford and Armstrong, 1875), 308; A[lida] G[raveraet] Radcliffe, Schools and Masters of Painting (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1876), 6; Louis Viardot, et al., An Illustrated History of Painters of All Schools (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington; Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1877), 5, 6; Phillip Sandhurst, The Table Book of Art: A History of Art in All Countries and Ages (New York: R. Worthington, 1880), 5-6; Alfred Wolfmann and Karl Woermann, History of Ancient, Early Christian, and Medieval Painting, ed. Sidney Colvin, vol. 1 (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1880), 48-49; Franz von Reber, History of Ancient Art, trans. Joseph Thacher Clarke (New York: Harper & Bros., 1882), 372-74; Pliny the Elder, The Boys' and Girls' Pliny, being Parts of Pliny's "Natural History", ed. John S. White (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1885), 297-98.

It is interesting to note that Pliny's story was retold, appropriately enough, in Louis Untermeyer, The World's Great Stories; Fifty-Five Legends That Live Forever (New York: M. Evans and Co., 1964), 72-73.

<sup>46</sup>"Art's Counterfeiting; Some Notable Examples of Deceiving the Eyes by Pictures," New York Star 30 December 1885, 6.

<sup>47</sup>Quoted in Frankenstein, 69. The painting under discussion was Harnett's 1884 version of After the Hunt in the Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, Ohio. A hand-written gloss on the clipping indicated that it came from the Munich Handesblatt, but no such newspaper is known to have existed.

<sup>48</sup>Cogswell, "Art in Boston," 305-06.

<sup>49</sup>Katherine Metcalf Roof, The Art and Life of William Merritt Chase (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1917), 37.

<sup>50</sup>Cogswell, *ibid.*, 306.

<sup>51</sup>[Cook], "Academy of Design Annual Exhibition," 5.

<sup>52</sup>Kenyon Cox, "Antoine Vollon," Manhattan 2, no. 6 (December 1883), 560.

<sup>53</sup>C[lara] H. Stranahan, A History of French Painting (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1888), 457.

<sup>54</sup>Arthur Edwin Bye, Pots and Pans; or Studies in Still-Life Painting (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1921), 130.

<sup>55</sup>[The Reverend Frederick Taylor Gates], "The Churches; Pictures at the Exposition Furnished Material for a Sermon. . . . Exposition Art; A Sermon on the Choice of Pictures for the Home," Minneapolis Tribune 12 September 1887, 5.

<sup>56</sup>Samuel G. W. Benjamin, What is Art, or Art Theories and Methods Concisely Stated (Boston: Lockwood, Brooks, and Co., 1877), 16.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup>Benjamin, Art in America: a Critical and Historical Sketch (New York: Harper & Bros., 1880), 95.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 95-96.

<sup>60</sup>Mrs. Schuyler van Rensselaer [Mariana Griswold], "Art in Churches; Mr. La Farge's Pictures in the Church of the Incarnation," New York Star 10 January 1886, 3.

<sup>61</sup>Jarves's interest in spiritualism is addressed in Francis Steegmuller, The Two Lives of James Jackson Jarves (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951), 138-41, 146; and Ruth Brandon, The Spiritualists: The Passion for the Occult in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1984), 67-68.

<sup>62</sup>James Jackson Jarves, The Art-Idea, ed. Benjamin Rowland, Jr. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1960), 204-05.

<sup>63</sup>Twain's dispatch to the San Francisco Alta California is reprinted in Mark Twain's Travels with Mr. Brown: Being Heretofore Uncollected Sketches Written by Mark Twain, coll. and ed. Franklin Walker and G. Ezra Dane (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1940), 238.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, 238-39.

<sup>65</sup>Heade's Lagoon, in Nicaragua may be the painting catalogued as Tropical Scene, c. 1863-1870, by Theodore E. Stebbins in his The Life and Works of Martin Johnson Heade (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975), 237, no. 128. To the best of my knowledge, Beard's The Hunter's Flask has not been located.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, 250.

<sup>67</sup>[Gates], "The Churches; Pictures at the Exposition," 5.

<sup>68</sup>"A Wonderland Opened Up at the Exposition," Cincinnati Enquirer 19 September 1886, 12.

<sup>69</sup>The text of this article is found in Frankenstein, After the Hunt, 76.

<sup>70</sup>"Art's Counterfeiting," New York Star, 6.

<sup>71</sup>"A Work of Art," New York Star 7 January 1886, 3.

<sup>72</sup>The anecdote appeared first in "Art's Counterfeiting" in the New York Star on 30 December 1885. It was apparently reprinted in the London Commercial Gazette before reappearing in the article "A Work of Art" in the New York Star on 7 January 1886, 3. An undated clipping of the London Commercial Gazette article is preserved in the Blemly Scrapbook.

<sup>73</sup>"Paintings Left By Artist Harnett," New York World 1 November 1892, 10.

<sup>74</sup>"Art: Clear & Teary," Time 53, no. 9 (February 28, 1949), 56.

<sup>75</sup>The existence of this warning sign was confirmed in a letter to the author from Dr. Franklin Kelly, Curator of Collections at The Corcoran Gallery, dated 30 May 1989. I should like to thank Dr. Kelly and Ms. Barbara Moore, Curator of Education at The Corcoran Gallery, for their kind help and cooperation.

<sup>76</sup>John Collier, A Primer of Art (London: MacMillan and Co., 1882), 19-20.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>78</sup>"Royal Academy; Third Notice," London Times 25 May 1885, 4.

<sup>79</sup>Executrix's Sale Catalogue of Paintings By the Late William Michael Harnett, 4; and E[dward] Taylor Snow, "William Michael Harnett, A Philadelphia Catholic Artist," American Catholic Historical Researches 10, no. 2 (April 1893), 76.

## CHAPTER 2

FURTHER OBSERVATIONS ON THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF WILLIAM  
M. HARNETT AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY STILL-LIFE PAINTING

By the time of his death in 1892 the art of William Harnett was firmly established in the minds of critics and the public alike, for better or worse, as a model of accomplished execution. For example, although Alfred Trumble, who was his friend, esteemed Harnett in an editorial in The Collector in 1893, he nevertheless remembered him as an artist who "could not create, he could simply imitate." Not even Trumble thought fit to praise Harnett's work without allowing that, "he painted what he could best paint, and [made] no pretensions to anything beyond."<sup>1</sup> Writing in Arts for America in 1896, when the art world's memory of Harnett was still fresh, a less sympathetic critic described his dismay at the buying public's lack of taste with these words:

To show the depravity of what stands for artistic taste in New York at the present time I may mention that a prominent sales gallery last night had an auction sale of miscellaneous paintings. A picture in Harnett's most villainously hard manner brought \$525, while a really excellent study by William M. Chase--"Fishing Boats at Anchor Off Bay Ridge"--a painting 24 by 26 inches in size, in a frame worth probably \$40, was purchased for \$25, and the audience was fairly representative of the "people" who buy pictures in New York.<sup>2</sup>

The anonymous writer evidently figured that not only was Harnett inseparably related to a realistic style, but his surname was sufficiently notorious as to make further

identification unnecessary. However, in the very last years of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth, with the advent of freer and more vigorous painting styles and diminished concern for spatial illusion, Harnett's name virtually disappeared from the critical arena. He was, as it were, dead and buried.

Yet on occasion Harnett's paintings reappeared, ghost-like, to evince the old rift between realism and idealism. In 1917, for example, in the Life, Art, and Letters of George Inness by George Inness Jr., Harnett was treated as an object of opprobrium. There was nothing new in that, except that Inness disdained to mention Harnett by name. George Jr., speaking of a visit to his father's studio, recalled how Inness (1825-94) scorned the deceit of illusionism. As in many another instance of late nineteenth-century criticism, Inness pointed contemptuously to the effort expended on creating deceptive effects for, in his words, "imitation is worthless. . . . in art, true art, we are not seeking to deceive." Inness described to George Jr. the following example:

In a bar-room in New York is a painting of a barn-door with hinges on it and a keyhole. It is painted so well that you would swear the hinges were real, and you could put your finger in the keyhole; but it is not real! It is not what it represents. It is a lie. Clever, yes, but it gives you no sensation of truth, because before you look at it you are told that it is a lie. The only charm in this picture is in deceiving you into the belief that it is a real barn-door.<sup>3</sup>

Inness thus seems to follow directly upon the Reverend Frederick Taylor Gates of Minneapolis in his distaste for deceptive realism, and to prefigure the comments of William T. Evans, a well-known patron of American art. In 1899 Evans declared,

I have been asked more than once whether I had seen the painting by the late Mr. Harnett, which is one of the attractions in a certain downtown cafe, entitled "Trophies of the Chase," and whether I did not consider it a fine work of art. I

invariably answer that it is not a work of art at all, but only a work of skill. The sight of such a canvas does not excite the admiration of the advanced collector, who looks for something more and better than illusion. An impression is conveyed by the optic nerve to the brain, but it does not get beyond the grey matter. It does not warm the heart, and we ask why it was ever painted.<sup>4</sup>

Like Evans, Inness was of course referring to Harnett's After the Hunt (Fig. 6), which hung in Theodore Stewart's saloon at 8 Warren Street in downtown New York. But while his words are really belated specimens of an argument spoken by an artist in and of the nineteenth century, they point to Harnett's incipient anonymity. Twenty-five years after his death, when the Life, Art, and Letters of George Inness was published, Harnett's name carried little weight if it appeared at all. Indeed, in the early twentieth-century histories of American art neither Harnett's name nor his work is ever mentioned.<sup>5</sup>

Thus in the early twentieth century Harnett was largely a forgotten man. The falling-away of interest was such that in 1937, when the artist was included in the recollective exhibition Painting as Our Grandfathers Knew It at the Columbus Gallery of Fine Arts in Columbus, Ohio, the Art Digest wrote: "Who, might ask a gallery visitor under forty, were: Gustave Egide, Charles Wappers, John Jay Barber, William de Leftwich Dodge, William M. Harnett or Victor Nehlig?"<sup>6</sup> As it happened, an answer, at least with respect to Harnett, could be found at The Downtown Gallery in New York. It was there in 1935 that Harnett first began to emerge from "the limbo of forgotten men," as the Art Digest put it.

Harnett's masterly The Faithful Colt (Fig. 8) had surfaced about 1935, and in April of that year was bought by the director of The Downtown Gallery in New

York, Edith Gregor Halpert. Two months later, the painting was sold to the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut. It was shown between October 1935 and January 1936 in the exhibition Thirty Paintings of Early America (which traveled to various cities in New England), between January and February 1938 in The Painters of Still Life at the Wadsworth Atheneum, and later that year in Trois Siècles d'Art aux États-Unis in Paris at the Musée du Jeu de Paume. In April of 1939 the painting was included, along with other newly located works by the artist, in the signal exhibition "Nature-Vivre" by William M. Harnett at The Downtown Gallery. Despite this exposure, familiarity with Harnett, let alone open admiration for his work, was still uncommon when Halpert stated in her introduction to the show:

While his recognition in the nineteenth century may have been due to his "artistic composition" and his reputation as "the most realistic painter of his age", our present interest in Harnett is based on more contemporary considerations. We marvel at the fact that he anticipated a style practiced today by the vanguard in France and in this country. His color is brilliant, the painting is flawless, and the composition organized in abstract pattern. But it is Harnett's combination of meticulous realism with an arbitrary juxtaposition of unrelated objects that may be said to provide a link between Dutch art of the seventeenth century and sur-realism of the twentieth.<sup>7</sup>

With these words Halpert presented the aesthetic framework that was to begin to reverse the negative view of Harnett's art found in previous criticism. (It was a framework outlined in the preceding year by A. Everett Austin Jr. and Henry-Russell Hitchcock Jr. in the foreword to The Painters of Still Life exhibition at the Wadsworth Atheneum, as shall appear later.) Halpert put aside the dichotomy between realism and idealism in her discussion of Harnett's work. However, like the criticism that preceded it, her analysis--which was based at least in part on mistakes

about the authorship of a fair number of paintings in the show--was ultimately tied to formal and stylistic concerns, not to subject matter and content.

To the degree that Halpert emphasized the "combination of meticulous realism with an arbitrary juxtaposition of unrelated objects," she could not help but overlook the idea that Harnett's paintings might carry patterns of meaning. And perhaps in an effort to promote Harnett as a painter with up-to-date appeal, Halpert related him to Surrealism--a connection the artist himself could not anticipate--which further diverted attention from questions of rational meaning. In any event, Halpert's gloss gave rise to discussions of Harnett in periodical literature and the press that took up the very same themes, and in which subject matter was never allowed to become more than a background for aesthetic considerations. For example, Edward Alden Jewell wrote in his New York Times review of the exhibition on 19 April 1939:

Harnett's subject matter range was not very extensive, nor needed it to be. Give him a few dog-eared books, a candlestick, a pipe, a sturdy ale mug, a newspaper or two, a violin, and he was quite content. These and similar objects he would arrange in still-life compositions sometimes conventional enough, though often, as he treated them, distinguished and powerful.

Though he was not entirely persuaded by Halpert's view of Harnett's work, Jewell nevertheless addressed the role that she had assigned to the artist.

All of Harnett's painting is scrupulously "realistic," yet often the result seems definitely on the abstract side.

In some respects it will remind the spectator of work by the famous French artist, Pierre Roy--with this significant difference, that, whereas William Harnett was concerned with nothing beyond the exact, and, as it were, superclarified verisimilitude just referred to, Pierre Roy is adept at creating the subtle, elusive overtone which makes him, in his own way, a surrealist.<sup>8</sup>

But an anonymous writer in Art Digest of 1 May 1939 was one of many who very

explicitly adopted the terms that Halpert had advanced.

American exponents of modernism immediately discerned in this painter of the 90's a precursor of such meticulous moderns as Salvador Dali and Pierre Roy. In Harnett's arbitrary juxtaposition of unrelated objects they found kinship with 20th century surrealists; in the patterns defined by the objects of his still lifes they discovered adherence to abstract principles of design; and in his fondness for filling out his composition with bits of newspaper, handbills and pasteboard tags so convincingly realistic that they seemed in danger of blowing off, they detected traits that blossomed fully in the latter day montage artists who pasted actual bits of paper to their canvases.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, at a very early stage in the Harnett revival writers could not envision his work without these traits, both in the presence and in the absence of the real McCoy. And so, on 22 April 1939, Cue magazine cast Harnett in the combined role of precursor of modern art and prestidigitator, as well as suspected counterfeiter. Describing Old Scraps (1894; Museum of Modern Art, New York), a painting later shown to be by the hand of John Frederick Peto, the writer breathlessly announced the following:

It is not, as you might well suppose, the work of some contemporary follower of the "trompe l'oeil" school of Pierre Roy and others, but that of an almost forgotten American painter who anticipated such a movement by a half century. The fidelity of his brush work is such that when the picture you see was being unpacked, the packer tried to pick up the piece of string at the right. During his career Mr. Harnett once painted a five dollar so faithfully that the Secret Service confiscated it. It was, however, finally returned to him--with a solemn warning from the Solicitor of the Treasury Dept. never to do such a thing again.<sup>10</sup>

In discussing Peto's Discarded Treasures (Fig. 9) as a Harnett, Mary Best, Custodian of the Smith College Museum of Art, in June 1939 drew on contemporary arguments about the artist and his twentieth-century analogues.

In his super-realistic objectivity Harnett anticipates the tantalizingly deceptive reality of a Pierre Roy. But the meticulous exactitude of Harnett never remains a mere tour de force. His compositions never contain the surrealist

incongruity of the insistent reality of unreality. Witness in our painting the logic of the composition of second-hand books. But here again, his logic as well as his super-realism anticipates the twentieth century. The "10 cent" placard and smaller torn label, so carefully painted that the spectator not only attempts to read the type but to feel the torn edge of the paper, is the nineteenth century forerunner of Picasso's introduction of texture in newspaper collage.

At the same time, however, she maintained a discerning attitude toward the idea of Harnett and modern art.

The greatest care was given by Harnett to the selection of his objects, not for the conflicting forces of "unreality" found in Pierre Roy but to obtain the maximum "narrative" reality. In an old newspaper clipping we find him quoted: "I endeavor to make the composition tell a story. The chief difficulty I have found has not been the grouping of my models but their choice." With this statement in mind it is somewhat paradoxical that a raconteur should carry his consideration for inanimate objects to a form of pure art existing in its own right--that his highly objective painting should approach the non-objectivity of abstraction.<sup>11</sup>

It is hardly surprising that Halpert's improbable but popular description became the frame around which the painter Marsden Hartley (1877-1943) erected his own picture of Harnett's work. Although Hartley, like a few others, did not accept Halpert's judgment at face value, he too was moved to consider Harnett with regard to Surrealism and, naturally enough, his aesthetic concerns, while completely dismissing the idea of meaning in the nineteenth-century painter's work. Here is Hartley from his unpublished essay "Wm. M. Harnett, Painter of Realism," written about 1939:

In the strict sense he was without personal life--he interpreted nothing--he in plain terms, had nothing to say--he had no esthetic motive--he was interested only in getting down a group of the commonest objects--for the pictures are all still-lives--and expressing every single aspect about them, not merely their shapes in the camera sense, but also their individual textures.<sup>12</sup>

And later he added:

Because there is no interpretation in Harnett, there is nothing to bother about, nothing to confuse, nothing to interpret, there are in the common sense no mindworkings--there is the myopic persistence to render every single thing, singly.<sup>13</sup>

Hartley proceeded to combine these notions with an assessment of Harnett that was less accommodating than Halpert's, but still open to a connection with Surrealist painting.

Harnett invested all his paintings with the reality of things, having nothing to do with interpretations. The association of ideas in the surrealist manner had no significance at all, and the surrealists have had and still have their almost painful sense of reality, as we find in the skillful but disconcerting paintings of Salvador Dali. . . .

I dwell on Dali's gift for realism because it is not so unlike that of Harnett, and . . . another of the same school--Pierre Roy.<sup>14</sup>

There is perhaps some irony in the fact that it was the rising tide of Surrealism in America in the 1930s that helped to re-establish interest in Harnett's realistic style and, at the same time, to promote a modernist view of it. The critical current that was acutely aware of the taste for illusionism in the work of Pierre Roy (1880-1950) and the Surrealist Salvador Dali (1904-89) could resurrect and animate Harnett's art (while neglecting its historical context) precisely because of his mode and technique. It was in these "modern" aspects of Harnett's work that contemporary interest lay. Indeed, the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford just as easily could have made a case for purchasing The Faithful Colt--Harnett's portrait of a .44 caliber Colt revolver--on the basis of the city's long connection with the Colt Manufacturing Company as it could on stylistic grounds: to modern eyes the late nineteenth-century painting appeared forward looking.

Thus, in The Sources of Modern Painting exhibition held at the Institute of

Modern Art in Boston in 1939, Harnett's The Faithful Colt was put side by side with Roy's Daylight Saving (Fig. 10). In the catalogue, James S. Plaut informed the reader that Roy's work "marks a reappearance in contemporary art of an old favorite among painters' themes: the so-called trompe l'oeil, whose object was to cheat the eye into believing in the actual existence of painted things." Plaut, wisely comparing what was similar about the works in order to isolate what was different, followed immediately with the probing observation that "Roy's work is startlingly akin to its ancestor in all respects but one, . . . whereas the assemblage of objects in the old painting is completely probable, Roy has brought together things whose coexistence in the real world we should never expect."<sup>15</sup> Much closer to Halpert's comments than to those published by the Institute of Modern Art was the catalogue entry on Harnett from the 1943 exhibition American Realists and Magic Realists at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Here, for example, the catalogue alluded to the contemporary admiration for Harnett's "color and design" and his "uncanny illusionistic technique which even though the subjects are commonplace produces an effect of trompe-l'oeil magic realism."<sup>16</sup> It should be observed that the appellation "magic realism" was used by Dorothy C. Miller in the foreword to the catalogue to describe "pictures of sharp focus and precise representation" in which "the subject has been . . . contrived by the imagination" and (quoting Alfred H. Barr Jr.) as "'the work of painters who by means of an exact realistic technique try to make plausible and convincing their improbable, dreamlike or fantastic visions.'<sup>17</sup> Harnett was, by the same token, brought into the orbit of Surrealism at the Hugo Gallery in New

York, where preparations for its 1945 show titled The Fantastic in Modern Art included procuring photographs of his work from Edith Halpert at The Downtown Gallery.<sup>18</sup>

That the connection between Harnett and Surrealism can be traced back, finally, to the Wadsworth Atheneum should come as no surprise, for it was in 1931 that the first important Surrealist exhibition in America was held there under the title Newer Super-Realism. Commanding the attention of the local press, A. Everett Austin Jr., the director of the Atheneum, offered an observation about the Surrealists which would later be applied to the work of Harnett. "The artist seeks to create an effect of surprise and astonishment," he said, "made breathtaking by the juxtaposition of strange and disparate objects."<sup>19</sup> It might be reasonably supposed that Halpert evolved her characterization of Harnett's art as a "combination of meticulous realism with an arbitrary juxtaposition of unrelated objects" and "a link between Dutch art of the seventeenth century and sur-realism of the twentieth" from ideas Austin had formulated about this time and presented again in the Wadsworth Atheneum's The Painters of Still Life show in 1938.

Although The Painters of Still Life exhibition was organized according to national schools, as a whole it teemed with the seemingly incompatible: from realist seventeenth-century Dutch painters such as Pieter Claesz. (1597/8-1661), Willem Claesz. Heda (1599-1680/2), and Willem Kalf (1619-93) to such twentieth-century Surrealist painters as Salvador Dali and René Magritte (1898-1967); from European modernists, Paul Cézanne (1839-1906) and Vincent Van Gogh (1853-90) to their

American contemporary William Harnett. This situation was not lost on the Art Digest which regarded the show as part of "the advanced 'Hartford Movement,'" national boundaries notwithstanding.<sup>20</sup> In their introduction to the exhibition, A. Everett Austin Jr. and Henry-Russell Hitchcock Jr. (writing under the pen name "JRS.") recognized "sympathetic echoes . . . cast forward from the art of ancient times into the present."<sup>21</sup> About seventeenth-century Dutch still-life painting, for example, they remarked as follows:

The still-lifes of the Dutch school . . . were neglected for more than a generation, by official taste, especially in America. But once more today they reward our attention. For now they seem to come to life again as the pendulum swings back from the abstract intellectualizing which dominated advanced art through the first third of the present century. Many who find little interest in Surrealism, find at least the courage to admire detailed painting again. For contemporary art has always a double importance. Besides its own intrinsic interest, it is perpetually leading us into some new part of the past which has been forgotten.<sup>22</sup>

(Even though Harnett was not cited in the passage, it is reasonable to assume that the audience was being invited to use this new-found courage to approach his painting as well.) According to their scheme, illusionist Surrealism's concern for both the visual and the imaginary also produced a kind of osmotic relationship between object and subject. In this form of Surrealism they wrote,

The object, in the startling guise of "dream object", rose, on the analogy of Freudian parable, past the rationalist "censor" of the theorists of abstraction. And with the dream object came not only mystery and the forbidden literary sentiment, but the pleasures of recognizability itself, so scorned for a generation.<sup>23</sup>

Note especially that for Austin and Hitchcock it was the "literary meaning" and "literary sentiment" of illusionist Surrealism in which the object played its necessarily

important role. This relationship, in turn, fostered a new acceptance of other forms of illusionistic art. "To the Surrealist, objects are symbols, and in order that they should function effectively, their recognizability becomes important," they argued. "Indeed, and this is the significant point, it is clear again that there is pleasure, not easily to be dismissed as non-esthetic, in recognizability as such."<sup>24</sup>

What is interesting about Austin and Hitchcock's notion of this modulation of object and subject is that in still life outside the bounds of Surrealism these elements were viewed as divisible, with the subjects lacking in significant meaning.

The subject matter of most still-lives is minor and irrelevant, compared to the often elaborately literary "subjects" of figure paintings. . . . The trophies of architectural implements or musical instruments, the shelf of kitchen utensils, are the barest excuse for a picture, considered in terms of their possible literary meaning. But the object itself becomes a special type of "subject", or perhaps one should say more precisely that the "subject" is really nothing but the recognizability of the object.<sup>25</sup>

This notion is especially interesting given the fact that among the Dutch paintings included in this exhibition were two vanitas still lifes, undisguisedly identified by the title Vanities.<sup>26</sup> In any case, there is a manifest disregard in the catalogue for the role that meaning can assume in traditional still-life painting; and, paradoxically, this disregard is in keeping with the views expressed on the issue of symbolic meaning by certain of the Surrealists themselves. Here is the Belgian Surrealist René Magritte on the topic:

To equate my painting with symbolism, conscious or unconscious, is to ignore its true nature. . . . People are quite willing to use objects without looking for any symbolic intention in them, but when they look at paintings, they can't find any use for them. So they hunt around for a meaning to get themselves out of the quandary, and because they don't understand what they are supposed to think when they confront the painting. . . . People who look for symbolic meanings

fail to grasp the inherent poetry and mystery of the image. No doubt they sense this mystery, but they wish to get rid of it. They are afraid. By asking 'what does this mean?' they express a wish that everything be understandable. But if one does not reject a mystery, one has quite a different response. One asks other things.<sup>27</sup>

By the 1940s the image of Harnett as a harbinger of modern art was commonly accepted in museums and galleries as well as in periodical literature and the press. For example, in 1940, in announcing the acquisition of Harnett's The Trophy of the Hunt (1885) by the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh, John O'Conner Jr. summarized the artist's modern appeal this way: "He is now coming into his own again because of the quality of his work, his keen sensitivity to color and to the beauty of abstract form, and his anticipation of some of the elements in contemporary painting."<sup>28</sup> Likewise, Elizabeth Ellsworth Gardner closely followed Halpert's point of view in her catalogue essay for The Downtown Gallery's 1948 Harnett Centennial Exhibition. "Harnett's paintings aroused the interest and admiration of the present generation not only for his extraordinary technical mastery," she wrote, nearly a decade after the "Nature-Vivre" show, "but also for his imaginative grouping of unrelated objects in abstract patterns, similar to the most advanced directions in painting today."<sup>29</sup> This kind of statement continued to go down rather well in reviews of Harnett exhibitions. "In the matter of arrangement," wrote Alonzo Lansford in the Art Digest of 15 April 1948, "Harnett sometimes seemed to anticipate the abstractionists."<sup>30</sup> And in the April 1948 issue of Art News, Renée Arb proclaimed:

"Artistic composition" and verisimilitude won recognition for Harnett in his day and there is no doubt that these qualities intrigue us today. But we see them in the light of his abstract designs, his hypnotic simplicity, his magic balance of objects just on the verge of toppling or rolling off the table.<sup>31</sup>

In November 1945 Edouard Roditi had seized upon this popular idea in an article titled "William Harnett: American Necromantic" for the avant-garde periodical View (which in the same month had sponsored The Fantastic in Modern Art show at the Hugo Gallery).<sup>32</sup> Roditi portrayed Harnett as a magic realist whose "lifeless objects" were "arranged, however concrete in themselves and however realistically painted, in patterns as abstract as those of any twentieth-century Cubist or Abstractionist, . . ."<sup>33</sup> Christopher E. Fremantle, writing in Studio in December 1948, likewise declared that Harnett "presages important present-day trends, and his work, in a certain analytical way, closely relates to that of Braque." He went on: "This is nowhere better seen than in a painting of a number of books lying on a shelf . . . arranged with so studied a disorientation of angles and planes that, if transformed into the cubist idiom, the composition would easily be attributed to the early Braque."<sup>34</sup> It hardly helped matters that Fremantle, unaware of a misattribution, would seem to be describing Peto's Discarded Treasures and not a painting by Harnett.<sup>35</sup> Nor did it help Fremantle's argument that Harnett's Mortality and Immortality (Fig. 11) was used as a backdrop for the article, for its iconography calls to mind a more hoary lineage of artistic relationships. Be that as it may, John Canaday, in his 1958 Metropolitan Seminars in Art series, presented a reasoned attempt to justify this modern critical prejudice. Comparing bonafide works by Harnett and the French Cubist Georges Braque (1882-1963), Canaday concluded that "the very realistic Old Violin and the highly abstract Musical Forms are first cousins."<sup>36</sup>

Indeed, the view of Harnett as a precursor of modern and contemporary art continued to spring up throughout the 1950s. In May 1950 Helen Comstock wrote in Connoisseur that "the irrational element never enters into the old trompe-l'oeil, and if the painters selected their subjects in completely arbitrary fashion from odd objects in the studio, they are nevertheless objects that could have had their place there."<sup>37</sup> But in describing Harnett's Old Models (Fig. 7), she noted: "The conquest of the three-dimensional creates a harmony of form, line, light and texture which approaches the plane of abstract values, and explains the fact that here is an art in which realist and abstractionist meet on common ground."<sup>38</sup> It is only fitting that Canaday returned to the subject of Harnett, if only in a footnote, in his Mainstreams of Modern Art of 1959. Recalling Halpert's familiar observation, written two decades earlier, Canaday noted that:

Harnett's still-lives were admired during his lifetime for the obvious reason, considering the taste of the day--their technique of illusionism. But merzbild and collage, making use of less-than-common-place objects and materials, have revealed how skillfully Harnett contrasted the textures of commonplace ones, while surrealism has brought new attention to the supernatural life with which his microscopic detail invests a piece of polished or weathered wood, a rusted hinge, or a crumpled letter, especially when these familiar things are placed in unusual juxtaposition.<sup>39</sup>

Observations of this sort can also be found in the 1970s. In Composing Pictures, published in 1970, Donald W. Graham remarked:

. . . a realistic image may be made so "real" that we are forced to consider the subject in a new way. Aspects of the subject may be shown that have previously escaped us. Colors, textures, minute details may be revealed to our delight or horror; a magic realism results, as in Harnett's After the Hunt. In fact the artist may create a super-real or surrealistic image. The illusion of space may be intensified far beyond anything ever experienced in nature.<sup>40</sup>

From yet another perspective, Oliver Snoddy in 1976 also embraced a modern point of view in his article "William Michael Harnett, Master of Eye-Deceiving Realism" in the Irish periodical Capuchin Annual. He wrote:

. . . Harnett was in his own way anticipating the surrealists and the Pop-Art movement (no spike or nail attaches the crucified to the wood in Salvador Dali's Christ of St. John of the Cross nor does any attachment fix the axle alpenstock to the door in Harnett's After the Hunt): for him as for Warhol the banalities of everyday life from treasury bills to tincan labels were legitimate and illuminating models.<sup>41</sup>

It is evident in Snoddy's claims that by the mid 1970s, well after the contemporaneity of Cubism and Surrealism had passed, newer critical concerns, parallel with evolving artistic trends, began to catch up with Harnett. Like commentators before them, writers in the 1960s and 1970s, whether in San Francisco, New York, or Dublin, reformulated Harnett's work with respect to such earlier movements as Cubism and Surrealism, but to this list they added the more up-to-date concerns of Pop art.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, after a brief reprieve, attempts were made to reabsorb Harnett into the tradition of modern art. For instance, in a catalogue entry on The Social Club (Fig. 3), written in 1989, James W. Tottis credited Harnett with having "created a surrealistic, dreamlike atmosphere."<sup>42</sup> His comment was dwarfed by Johanna Drucker's March 1992 article "Harnett, Haberle, and Peto: Visuality and Artifice among the Proto-Modern Americans."<sup>43</sup> Drucker chose to disregard the incarnations of Harnett's hand and mind in Surrealist and Pop art, and even called into question the old practice of placing Harnett's compositions in relation to those of early twentieth-century modernists. "There are many points of similarity between the canvases of Harnett, Haberle, and Peto and the collages and

abstractions of the Cubists and Dadaists," she asserted, "but composition is the least of these."<sup>44</sup> Drucker argued instead that

the link between the early modernist sensibility of the European avant-garde and the late nineteenth-century American trompe l'oeil painters can be more clearly seen in the concerted effort of both groups to use the activity of painting to investigate the way in which the reproduction and presentation of visual signs is conceived to operate in relation to the presumed order of the real. A further link is forged by their shared concern with conceptual images, those intended to depict activities that by their very nature are unrepresentable in pictorial terms--either because they are abstract concepts or because their temporal and spatial identities cannot be translated into direct reproduction in the space of a static image.<sup>45</sup>

Of Harnett paintings such as The Artist's Letter Rack (1879; Metropolitan Museum of Art) and Mr. Huling's Rack Picture (1888; Collection of Jo Ann and Julian Ganz, Jr.), she wrote that

perhaps the most significant observation that may be made with respect to these works by Harnett, Haberle, and Peto is the degree to which they demonstrate that they are displays of the real in terms of its signs, thus reinforcing the semiotic proposition that the real exists because it is articulated in terms of signs. Furthermore, the primacy of representation as presentation is one of the characteristic features of modernism, and it is one of the premises by which these artists conceived their practices, sharing a sensibility that will be characteristic of European avant-garde artists in the early twentieth century. The collages of Picasso, Braque, and Schwitters, for instance, assert a similar attitude toward the primacy of fragments of life as lived, the ordinary and banal in its presentational mode.

Drucker closed with this thought:

The fact that works by Harnett, Haberle, and Peto identify themselves as American does not disqualify them from the mainstream of modernism; rather it actively reinforces the extent to which modernity is always concerned with the specific site, moment, and character of the context from which it draws.<sup>46</sup>

What is striking about this article is how Drucker's theoretical views rigidly determined her assessment of Harnett's sensibility. In fact, Drucker was so absorbed

with matters of theory that when she confronted a nonvisual, as opposed to a visual, sign she became grossly unscholarly. She noted, for example, that Frankenstein "refers to this [the term 'bachelor paintings'] and another phrase by one 'Born' who termed these 'bachelor still life[s]'.<sup>47</sup> The "one" in question is Wolfgang Born, the well-known author of a ground-breaking study of American still-life painting, Still-Life Painting in America (1947), as well as an article titled "William M. Harnett: Bachelor Artist." Or, consider the following:

A canvas from 1876 that he [Harnett] titled Mortality and Immortality, with its nearly cliché skull and candlestick in deep, dark space, is essentially indistinguishable from a traditional memento mori. There are specific reasons for this within Harnett's biography. He began to paint in the middle of the 1870s around the time of his trip to Germany, first to Dusseldorf, then shortly after to Munich where he spent four years. During this period he closely studied Old Master still lifes and improved his technique accordingly. As [William] Gerds points out, Harnett made a place for himself in the highly competitive arena of still-life painting in Munich, achieving recognition equal to or greater than that of the most renowned among the Germans--Joseph Mansfield [sic] and Camille Friedlander [sic], for instance.<sup>48</sup>

The title Mortality and Immortality is not Harnett's; it was provided by The Downtown Gallery, and it first appeared in November 1939 when the work was included in the Paintings of William M. Harnett exhibition at the Society of Arts and Crafts in Detroit. In all probability, Mortality and Immortality is the painting exhibited in 1892 at Earle's Galleries in Philadelphia under the title Life and Death. If Harnett was familiar with the European still-life tradition by the mid 1870s, and it can be strongly argued on the basis of works such as Mortality and Immortality that he was, then his interest in the Old Masters was apparent before his trip to Germany. In fact, Harnett did not arrive in Germany until 1881, where he resided in Frankfurt,

not in Düsseldorf as Drucker indicated, before moving on to Munich. Also, in this era of nationalism and ethnic consciousness, it may be necessary to note that both Josef Mansfeld and Camilla Friedländer were Austrian, not German.

Such carelessness undermines confidence in Drucker's analytical procedures, and one is not surprised to find that her consideration of "the premises by which these artists conceived their practices" failed to mention Harnett's statements about his aims and ambitions which appeared in an interview in the New York News around 1889 or 1890. As Gerdt's points out, the interview "is the most significant piece of autobiographical data on Harnett and the most important contemporary source of information on the artist."<sup>49</sup> Drucker's indifference to this source, as well as to contemporary insights and criticism, suggests that at best her modernist theory considers something less than the premises by which Harnett conceived his practice.

Thus over a span of about fifty years, Harnett's work has been read more or less consistently in the wide-arc light of modern art and theory, and often with a certain period flavor. It is not the case that these contemporary attitudes and observations merely represent the view from the fringes of criticism. In the chapter "William Harnett, Every Object Rightly Seen" from her widely respected book American Painting of the Nineteenth Century (first published in 1969), a source which did not go unnoticed by Drucker, the distinguished art historian Barbara Novak alluded in passing to the idea that "Harnett's mellowed objects, splintered doors, and torn labels . . . have an interesting relation to the rehabilitation of the discard which has extended from Cubist collage and Dada to the junk sculpture of the late 1950's

and early 1960's."<sup>50</sup> She closed her chapter on Harnett with a paradox:

He so exactly superimposes reality and abstraction that they obscure one another. A formalist might be so struck by Harnett's design that he never sees the objects; another might see the objects and not the design. Harnett it seems, achieved a complete reciprocal system, in which his objects depend for their reality on abstraction, and abstraction depends for its perfection on objects. This is another way of saying that he made such distinctions irrelevant, and speaking of his pictures in terms of either reality or abstraction does them violence. They are both and neither; that is, at their best, they are perfect pictures.<sup>51</sup>

Comparisons with twentieth-century art, then, have been a commonplace feature in considerations of Harnett's work well beyond the middle of the century. Despite encompassing a rather wide and shifting range of aesthetic forms, such comparisons were used to assess his work so frequently as to become a cliché of Harnett criticism. Even the supporting quotation for Novak's complex analysis--Ralph Waldo Emerson's "'every object rightly seen, unlocks a new faculty of the soul'"--was raised by way of Harnett's relation to "such diversities as Emersonian Transcendentalism and de Chirico's symbolism."<sup>52</sup> And though, for Novak, Harnett looms large "within the category of conceptual realism--in which the presentation of the object is controlled by a knowledge of its properties that is tactile and intellectual, rather than optical or perceptual,"<sup>53</sup> she rests her case for the artist on the abstract concept of "perfect pictures." Whether Harnett's art is Janus-faced, as Novak suggests, or not, she purposely ignored the possibility that reality and abstraction (or style and design) are deeply intertwined so as to maximize the expression of meaning.

But the idea of meaning in Harnett's paintings was, even in the 1940s, not altogether absent; Born made that much clear in Still-Life Painting in America. There are indications that Born was affected by certain articles of faith among Harnett's

commentators. For example, he expressed a concern cognate with contemporary critics when he raised the issue of Harnett "arranging heterogeneous objects in such a way as to haunt the spectator by their irrational effect."<sup>54</sup> However, what really seemed to attract him was the exploration of "deeper meaning" in Harnett's art. "Despite the superficial appeal that his paintings had for an indiscriminating public," he wrote, "the more refined among his admirers must have felt that there was something more to Harnett's work than trickery."<sup>55</sup>

Born attempted to reveal aspects of Harnett's personal life and psychology by exploring the iconography of his pictures. Among other points, he described To the Opera (1870; formerly Downtown Gallery, New York) as "a close-up of a hand carrying a walking stick," and proceeded to propose that it was "a bizarre little work that in a roundabout way seems to disclose a negative attitude toward men, for it substitutes a limb for the whole figure." He held, as had Edouard Roditi before him, that "the painter gave the hand a macabre, lifeless appearance. It hints that he fought shy of people and was haunted by the thought of death."<sup>56</sup> It was Born who had also reasoned, we may remember, that "if the fire insurance poster [in the Old Souvenir] really suggests a smoldering desire, the photograph of the little girl might suggest that the actual content of the old souvenir is the restrained lament of a solitary man who longs without hope for the return of a childhood love."<sup>57</sup> For Born, exploration of the relation between Harnett's imagery and his psychodynamics must have had a natural appeal. His essay chronicling "The Art of the Insane" had appeared in Ciba Symposia in January 1946, less than a year before the Magazine of Art published an

article on Harnett extracted from the author's forthcoming book.<sup>58</sup> However, his argument was crucially marred by the huge defect that neither To the Opera nor Old Souvenirs was painted by Harnett--not a very effective way of introducing the question of meaning in Harnett's art. Whether Born's belief was a fanciful conjecture or had a basis in reality, the weight of his argument, like those of other writers and critics over the preceding two decades, was reduced, when not completely nullified, by the whole problem of misattribution.

Shortly thereafter, this problem was identified and resolved by Alfred Frankenstein, the music and art critic for the San Francisco Chronicle. As recently as 1984, however, an article by Olive Bragazzi in the American Art Journal criticized Frankenstein's "lack of scholarship," even as it acknowledged that he had forced a re-evaluation of Harnett's oeuvre.<sup>59</sup> Objecting to "Frankenstein's omission of a documented version of Harnett's masterpiece, After the Hunt [1884; the Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, Ohio], from the first edition of his book," Bragazzi remarked, "the oversight resulted in a serious gap in his book [After the Hunt: William Harnett and Other American Still Life Painters, 1870-1900] and a missed opportunity for as dramatic a 'hunt' as any he conducted in his entire Harnett-Peto campaign."<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, the importance of Frankenstein's effort ought not be underestimated. Although hindsight tends to make us look at the persistent misattribution of paintings to Harnett with snickers and smug self-assurance, in the uncertain days before Frankenstein disentangled Harnett's artistic canon, the recognition of the internal differences and contradictions in what had only just

emerged as his oeuvre was exceedingly complicated. All the more praise then is due for Frankenstein's detailed and comprehensive studies of the painter, beginning with his 1949 article "Harnett, True and False" and the publication of the first edition of his book After the Hunt in 1953, which succeeded not only in elucidating the essentials of Harnett's pictorial style but in dramatically shattering the consensus about his oeuvre.<sup>61</sup>

As far as Frankenstein was concerned, Born's clinical analysis of Harnett could not pass without comment. To be sure, Frankenstein made some allowance for unwitting errors of attribution at a time when the state of knowledge was a veritable mine of misinformation. But he naturally took issue with Born's delineation of the clinical features and psychodynamics of Harnett's work on the basis of paintings mistakenly ascribed to the artist. With Born's diagnosis of Old Souvenirs in mind and evidence for its misattribution to Harnett in hand, Frankenstein delivered a scathing attack on attempts to "psychoanalyze [Harnett] on the basis of his iconography," which he vividly characterized, we may also remember, as "no more than a pretentious, pseudoscientific effort to cater to the make-the-picture-tell-a-story trade."<sup>62</sup>

Significantly, amid the devastation, Frankenstein showed himself sympathetic to exploring common aesthetic ground between Harnett and modern painters like Pierre Roy.<sup>63</sup> And this notion was to persist in Frankenstein's thought and criticism to the end. Indeed, the same argument can be found in an article by Frankenstein called "Illusion and Reality" that appeared in July 1979, just two years

before his death. "In the work of Harnett and his following . . . all our attention is centered on things devoid of human content: on their forms, their textures and colors," he wrote. "It follows that this ultrarealistic art is also one of the most important forms of abstract art."<sup>64</sup>

It would be too much to say that Frankenstein's proscription against iconographic interpretation entirely precluded mention of symbolic meaning in the art of Harnett. He gave this point of view a limited hearing in his book After the Hunt; but it was very limited indeed. In discussing the painting Mortality and Immortality, for example, Frankenstein made it conspicuously clear that the theme was repugnant. "Harnett falls back upon the most piously platitudinous of traditional still life motifs--that of the so-called Vanitas picture," he remarked, "which juxtaposes a skull with works of art, living things, and, occasionally, jewelry and precious stones."<sup>65</sup> Of the picture's iconography, which over the course of his analysis competed unfavorably with questions of style, texture, and composition, Frankenstein observed:

[Harnett] is fascinated by books, but he has no interest in their literary implications. Any book will do so long as its shape, color, and texture are right for his pictorial purposes; what the book may signify as a work of poetry or prose does not concern him in the least.

He continued:

Printed pages are, for Harnett, merely another texture; . . . Harnett's painted sheet-music is also entirely a matter of texture, . . . [one] suspects that when Harnett wished to paint a sheet of music he selected one at random from the stack he had on hand, but it clearly lost all musical meaning for him as soon as it was set up as a model.

By way of a conclusion, Frankenstein added an important note. "It is rather curious, but probably accidental and meaningless," he wrote, "that the same tune from Norma,

. . . shows up in Harnett's Old Cupboard Door, painted thirteen years after Mortality and Immortality.<sup>66</sup> It seems appropriate to point out (if only incidentally at this stage) that the sheet music from the opera Norma is in tune with the theme of vanitas, a theme which accounts for the central message of both The Old Cupboard Door (Fig. 12) and Mortality and Immortality.

This analysis is by no means the only critique of Frankenstein's in which the issue of meaning went unrecognized or was made incidental; in fact, it established the uncompromising viewpoint and tone that resonates through his many studies of Harnett, both early and late. In his March 1970 article "Yankee Rhyparography," for example, there is a caption under Harnett's Job Lot Cheap (Fig. 13)--a depiction of old books--which insightfully suggests that the painting was based upon European memento mori.<sup>67</sup> But this provocative idea was scrupulously avoided in the body of the text, and in drawing the essay to a close Frankenstein reiterated his familiar complaint:

If there is one thing more tiresome than the criticism of still-life for its alleged failure to deal with great issues--criticism that was brought against it throughout the nineteenth century--it is the effort to raise the standing of the subject by discovering that it does deal, after all, with profoundly earnest matters.<sup>68</sup>

Even champions of the art of trompe l'oeil painting reinforced this interpretation. M. L. d'Otrange Mastai declared in Illusion in Art (1975) that "trompe l'oeil 'never tells a story' for its sole purpose is to precisely mirror those aspects of reality that cannot be expressed as well by means of words."<sup>69</sup> And, in Images of Deception, The Art of Trompe L'Oeil (1979), Célestine Dars asserted with regard to the work of Harnett, Peto, and Haberle that "there is little trace of intellectual life in their paintings" and

that the American trompe l'oeil artists were merely "craftsmen at heart."<sup>70</sup>

It is hardly surprising, given the authority of Frankenstein's indispensable but imposing After the Hunt, as well as the influence of his numerous essays and articles on Harnett, that his point of view was maintained in subsequent commentary. In Barbara B. Lassiter's 1971 exhibition catalogue on the collection of the Reynolda House, Museum of American Paintings (Winston-Salem), for instance, her essay on Job Lot Cheap turned on matters of technique and style, not subject.<sup>71</sup> Accordingly, Lassiter summed up the picture in a November 1970 article on the Reynolda House collection this way:

William Harnett's 'celebrated book painting,' Job Lot, Cheap, is a masterpiece of trompe l'oeil. The frazzled backs, the crushed corners, and the tiny rents in the old books show Harnett's love of minutiae. There is endless variety in the material and textures of the book covers and fore edges, and each separate page is defined and sometimes emphasized by an irregular cutting.<sup>72</sup>

Adherence to Frankenstein's dictum is also obvious in the entry on Mortality and Immortality in the Catalogue of the Roland P. Murdock Collection (Wichita Art Museum), published in 1972. Here, George P. Tomko clearly echoed Frankenstein's discussion of the painting in After the Hunt, beginning with the statement that "for his subject Harnett has fallen back upon the traditional theme of the memento mori--the still life with a skull as a reminder of death." And then, following in Frankenstein's footsteps, he diverted attention from the subject of meaning by quoting Frankenstein liberally on points of style and composition.<sup>73</sup>

A few years later Carol J. Oja--a musicologist, not an art historian--pursued the issue of seventeenth-century Dutch precedents for Harnett's musical subjects in

her valuable Master's thesis "Musical Instruments in the Paintings of William Michael Harnett." In her discussion of the relation between Harnett and the Dutch tradition, Oja showed herself familiar with Ingvar Bergström's renowned book Dutch Still-Life Painting in the Seventeenth Century, and with its detailed analysis of the symbolism of the vanitas still life.<sup>74</sup> Oja noted a close connection between Harnett's musical subjects and the iconographic tradition of Dutch vanitas still life, but stopped short of suggesting that his pictures were meant to express symbolic meaning--an obeisance, perhaps, to Frankensteinian dogma. In any case, she took care not to follow Born down the interpretative path.

When Harnett painted his musical subjects within the confines of the vanitas concept was he merely imitating an appealing style of representing musical subjects, books, and antique objects, or was he actually aware of the symbolism inherent in these particular arrangements? The available data tend to favor the former conclusion. The meager sources that remain seem to depict a man who was attracted to the vanitas only because it provided an attractive means of utilizing his music instruments, scores, old books, and other curiosities, and because the paintings that resulted were immensely appealing to a certain sector of the public.<sup>75</sup>

Derived from her thesis, there appeared an article in the Musical Quarterly of October 1977 in which Oja presented a slightly revised argument. In the article she conceded that "the recurrence of certain items and the dark, somber character that many of his paintings project seem to suggest that Harnett was at least partially aware of the emphasis on death and moral retribution that was imbedded in the Dutch Vanitas arrangements." With a sound and understandable instinct for caution, Oja nonetheless remained skeptical about Harnett's "comprehension of the symbolism inherent in these objects." And she repeated the same conclusion as cited above.<sup>76</sup>

Thus, the prevailing opinions about Harnett in the 1970s continued to follow Frankenstein's point of view to a lesser but still intimidating degree. It comes as no surprise that the entry on Harnett in the Britannica Encyclopedia of American Art, published in 1973, was written by Frankenstein. And true to form he characterized Harnett's achievement in this forum in terms of his technique, style, and design. Predictably if incidentally, the essay also was spiced with the kind of references to modern art that had helped stimulate and sustain interest in the artist from the 1930s on.<sup>77</sup>

But by the 1980s there was a growing body of literature in which iconographic content was no longer dismissed as unworthy of consideration, and in which the issue of meaning emerged as an obvious subject for thought. This development was not the result of something as dramatic as a leap of the imagination. Rather it was the consequence of steps taken early in the 1970s in the direction of a more earnest and open approach to the problem of iconographic content in Harnett's art. It should be remembered that Frankenstein himself had no doubt that Harnett's Mortality and Immortality was related to the tradition of vanitas, but he never took the problem seriously and it came to nothing in his investigations. Beginning in the 1970s, however, the issue of meaning began to breathe with new life.<sup>78</sup> Despite the deadening effect of Frankenstein's criticism, historians of American art began to look at iconographic interpretation of Harnett still lifes as a viable addition to the favored modes of analysis.

In 1971, in their comprehensive survey American Still-Life Painting,

William H. Gerdts and Russell Burke assumed the lead in legitimizing the study of meaning in Harnett's work. The iconographic content of Mortality and Immortality was accepted and discussed in this book quite as a matter of course. In contrast to Frankenstein's incurious references to the subject matter of Mortality and Immortality, Gerdts and Burke put more stress on the symbolic content of the work, and made a case for the picture as part of the long-established tradition of vanitas painting in Europe, as well as in America. They also addressed themselves to the issue, then in discredit, of "a psychological significance" in Harnett's paintings. While eschewing the clinical perceptions of Wolfgang Born, they spoke about the role of "post-Civil War pessimism" in the iconography of late nineteenth-century American trompe-l'oeil painting.<sup>79</sup> Later, Gerdts, a prolific writer on a broad range of American art history, reinforced these interpretations in his 1981 book Painters of the Humble Truth: Masterpieces of American Still Life 1801-1939. As regards the use of symbolism, Gerdts credited Harnett with having "reintroduced or, in terms of American art, 'invented' the vanitas still life, the still life featuring a human skull."<sup>80</sup>

The results of these studies were absorbed into Milton W. Brown's general introductory book on American Art to 1900, published in 1977. Brown, himself a leading authority on American art, noted that Harnett's "memento mori still lifes were obviously traditional," and it may be supposed that the author took as self-evident the idea that the memento mori expressed symbolic meaning. To be sure, in the next sentence Brown declared that "the story element in Harnett is fundamental," notwithstanding Frankenstein's warning against "the-make-the-picture-tell-a-story

trade." And, like Gerdts and Burke, he felt that it was "not always [expressed] in an anecdotal sense."<sup>81</sup> Yet, it is revealing that Brown still described Harnett as an artist who "tells his story or draws his moral by implication . . . through the objects and their interrelationship rather than iconographical detail."<sup>82</sup> Even Gerdts, a scholar who brought to the subject a knowledge and experience few can match, discussed only Harnett's skull pictures in terms of intrinsic meaning. But while these scholars presented no symbolical interpretations of paintings without the human skull, they had removed the obstacle of critical opposition to the very idea of the existence of meaning in Harnett's oeuvre. In creating an atmosphere more accepting of the role of iconographic meaning in Harnett's art—a position which few scholars or critics before this point would have advanced—Gerdts, Burke, and Brown helped mark out a path for future questions about content in the artist's work.

The assumption that certain paintings by Harnett did indeed carry meaning led other scholars to take steps along this little-trodden path. Within a few years of these studies, the question of meaning in Harnett's art emerged as a focus of serious attention. But the interest was by no means confined to the work of Harnett. The enhanced sensitivity to iconography and meaning was evident in John Wilmerding's penetrating study Important Information Inside: The Art of John F. Peto and the Idea of Still-Life Painting in Nineteenth-Century America, which appeared in 1983. In his effort to determine the significance of Peto's art, Wilmerding confidently gave weight to "the meanings intimated by ordinary and familiar objects chosen for aesthetic attention."<sup>83</sup> In turn, he recognized "Harnett's sensibility for giving to his forms

allegorical functions" and supported that view with references to Harnett's My Gems of 1888 (Fig. 14).<sup>84</sup> However, he tempered that discerning judgment by resolving that Peto's "soiled and chaotic books stand as reminders of our mortality, affecting reformulations of the memento mori convention" while Harnett's Job Lot Cheap implies only an "ambiance [sic] of genre."<sup>85</sup> This suggestion had behind it the momentum of recent studies which had advanced the belief, as Wilmerding proceeded to do, that "Harnett's treatment of the [memento mori] theme employs the much more standard image, taken directly from Dutch precedents, of a skull, guttered candle, and torn book binding with its pointedly inscribed message . . . ."<sup>86</sup> Writing in a broader context in 1981, Wilmerding made it eminently clear that "where Harnett assembles his fragments of existence mainly as antiquarian artifacts for study, Peto penetrates the surfaces of reality to ruminate on the substance of art."<sup>87</sup> In this connection Wilmerding made note of Peto's "witty visual conceits,"<sup>88</sup> a trait which he does not seem to find exhibited in Harnett's work. It should be pointed out that in 1985 Gertrude Grace Sill, thinking along related but separate lines, stated that John Haberle's work is "replete with subtle layers of meaning and humorous visual puns . . . . [and] in this regard, his paintings are quite distinct from those of either Harnett or Peto."<sup>89</sup>

It is clear that in no other paintings by Harnett other than his skull pictures was there more ground for confidence that symbolic meaning was an essential concern. But there were other paintings conducive to iconographic interpretation, and a small number of students of Harnett's art have begun to address their attention to

the question of meaning in these works. With each passing year, or so it seems, a growing number of writers have begun to extend the scope of Harnett's concerns in the direction of what Frankenstein had repeatedly decried as "profoundly earnest matters."

This development was exemplified by Barbara S. Groseclose, who delivered a lecture on "Vanity and the Artist: Some Still-Life Paintings by William Michael Harnett" at the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute in Utica, New York in November 1983.<sup>90</sup> She published her observations under the same title in the American Art Journal in 1987.<sup>91</sup> Naturally such memento mori paintings as Mortality and Immortality, Memento Mori--"To This Favour" (Fig. 15) and To This Favor--A Thought from Shakespeare (Fig. 16) came in for extended discussion. But Groseclose did more than elaborate the background and substance of these canvases; she went on to present the thought-provoking proposition that "the memento mori comprises but one element within the larger genre of vanitas paintings, . . . the subject underlying Harnett's writing table and bachelor paintings."<sup>92</sup> With her usual clarity and grace, Groseclose advanced the compelling argument that "with or without the exegesis of vanitas, notions of transience and the emptiness of earthly existence waft through such deceptively prosaic little pictures."<sup>93</sup> To this end, Groseclose demonstrated a reading of such characteristic examples as Still-Life Writing Table of 1877 (Philadelphia Museum of Art) that nicely accommodated the iconography of paintings in this genre to "an internal, even idiosyncratic rumination on the futility of the human effort to communicate."<sup>94</sup>

Groseclose's observations do not stand alone. In his catalogue entry on Music and Literature, Steven A. Nash remarked that,

Despite their almost scientific visual objectivity, Harnett's paintings have an expressive dimension which seems to relate most closely to the vanitas still life tradition in European art. In the crumpled and tarnished surfaces of the carefully rendered objects and in the hermetic quality of his work there is a melancholic note and a reminder of the passage of time. This iconographic dimension is occasionally made more explicit with such symbols as the skull in Mortality and Immortality and the musical score "Helas, Quelle Douleur" which figures in numerous works.<sup>95</sup>

Robert F. Chirico subscribed to this point of view in his fine article on "Language and Imagery in Late Nineteenth-Century Trompe L'Oeil" in Arts Magazine in March 1985. In this essay, Chirico, who had demonstrated a marked sensitivity to iconographic issues in his 1978 article "John Haberle and Trompe-L'Oeil,"<sup>96</sup> pressed the argument that "in America, trompe l'oeil can be at its best specifically when it is trying to tell a story."<sup>97</sup> Though he focused his attention more particularly on trompe l'oeil paintings by Haberle, Chirico had no qualms about describing both Peto's Discarded Treasures and Harnett's Job Lot Cheap as "expressions of transience and contemplation . . . ."<sup>98</sup>

The growing interest in iconographic content gave rise to other questions about meaning in Harnett's paintings. In February 1985, the present author presented an iconographic interpretation of Harnett's The Old Cupboard Door at the College Art Association meeting in Los Angeles.<sup>99</sup> A revised version of this paper was published in the American Art Journal in 1986. In spite of the absence of a death's head, the author proposed that Harnett not only gave countenance to the theme of vanitas in The Old Cupboard Door, but also gave to it the related dimension of the Five Senses.<sup>100</sup>

Taken together with Groseclose's critical study, this work helped to expand the bounds of Harnett's interest in the vanitas, from pictures as intimate as his writing table and bachelor paintings to The Old Cupboard Door, one of his last and most monumental works. The author carried the matter further still in a catalogue essay on Harnett's 1882 painting A Study Table (Fig. 17) in Masterworks of American Art from the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, published in 1989. The entry was premised on the conviction that Harnett in this ambitious painting, as in The Old Cupboard Door, was making legible the intricate weavings of the imagery of vanitas and the Five Senses; and that the minute illusionism of Harnett's work bore, in consequence, the force of a revelation, however it preoccupied most observers for its verisimilitude.<sup>101</sup> The author again explored the question of meaning in a paper titled "'For my days are consumed like smoke': William Michael Harnett's The Social Club and the Theme of Vanitas," presented at the annual meeting of the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts in March 1990.<sup>102</sup>

In 1992, on the occasion of the centennial of Harnett's death, a major exhibition was organized by Doreen Bolger, Marc Simpson, and John Wilmerding. The show opened at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and traveled to the Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth and The Fine Art Museums of San Francisco before ending at The National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. in 1993. It was accompanied by a catalogue which presented twenty-two essays on almost every aspect of his development, including six that considered, to varying degrees, the idea of meaning in Harnett's work.<sup>103</sup> Roxana Robinson discussed the symbolism of

the horseshoe with respect to Colossal Luck (1886; Private collection) and The Golden Horseshoe (1886; Berry-Hill Galleries, New York), and suggested that the rusty horseshoe suspended on a pearl stickpin in the latter painting was a punning reference to the exclusive boxes underneath the balcony at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, which was known as "The Golden Horseshoe."<sup>104</sup> Jennifer Hardin pursued the question of vanitas symbolism in the late paintings The Old Cupboard Door and Old Models, which she linked to an awareness of death sharpened by Harnett's failing health and the death of his mother.<sup>105</sup> Thayer Tolles Mickel offered interpretations of Harnett's Still Life with Wine Glass (1876; Allison Gallery, New York) and Peaches and Flies (1877; Kennedy Galleries, New York) which suggested the artist's acquaintance with the iconography of Christian symbolism.<sup>106</sup> The present author explored Harnett's recurring interest in the theme of vanitas.<sup>107</sup> Judy L. Larson surveyed the vast store of literature in Harnett's art, arguing that his careful use of literary references displayed a high degree of concern for medieval values and symbolism.<sup>108</sup> Discussing a host of pictures, including A Study Table, Still Life with Bust of Dante (1883; High Museum of Art, Atlanta), Music (1886; Manoogian Collection), Still Life--Violin and Music (1888; Metropolitan Museum of Art), Larson concluded that Harnett's paintings are informed frequently with "allusions to life, death, and eternity."<sup>109</sup> Marc Simpson was more fully concerned with the nature of the music and the musical instruments displayed in Harnett's work, but was sensitive to the relationship between melody and meaning, noting Harnett's capacity to develop "an iconographic program, wherein the choice of melodies demonstrably shades the

subtle meanings of his compositions."<sup>110</sup> These essays provided a serviceable introduction to the question of symbolic meaning in Harnett's art and, together with Groseclose's study of the artist's writing table and bachelor paintings, represent the range of currently envisioned possibilities. It is especially noteworthy that while their focus of attention and interpretation of overlapping detail are different, the essays by Hardin, Mickel, Larson, and the present author either touched upon or stressed the importance of the vanitas theme in Harnett's paintings.

The general acceptance and growth of iconographic investigations of American art is evident in Bruce W. Chambers's informative study "Old Money: American Trompe L'Oeil Images of Currency," written in 1988 in conjunction with an exhibition at the Berry-Hill Galleries in New York.<sup>111</sup> Chambers offered a wide-ranging account of American still-life paintings of money, one which addressed the iconography deposited in these works on an impressive variety of interpretative levels. What unified the various themes in his study was more than the general concern for images of money: it was rather the idea, made abundantly clear over the course of Chambers's essay, that American trompe-l'oeil still life "is not only an art of mischievous replication; it is an art of real content."<sup>112</sup>

It is now 100 years since Harnett's death, and what emerges from much of the most recent studies on the artist is the belief that his productions are considerably more interesting and complex than had been commonly allowed. In Harnett's heyday, the long-standing conflict between realism and idealism lay at the bottom of commentary on the artist's work. After the Harnett revival in the 1930s, critical

response to his art was dominated by modernist aesthetics and values. However, in the four decades since the publication of Alfred Frankenstein's seminal book After the Hunt, the very way in which the art of Harnett and his contemporaries is viewed has come under question. Today, questions of iconography and meaning have begun to attract greater scholarly interest in comparison to the earlier concern for the analysis of Harnett's style, his artistic sources, and his influence on other artists. The iconographic agenda is not the only one worthy of serious thought or consideration, nor does the search for deeper meaning in Harnett's works diminish the effectiveness of his technical achievement or minimize his place as the cornerstone of trompe l'oeil painting in the late nineteenth-century. Yet answers to questions of iconography and meaning bear intimately on our understanding of Harnett's art and time, and it becomes desirable and necessary to probe further the role of meaning in his oeuvre.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>[Alfred Trumble], untitled editorial statement, Collector 4, no. 19 (October 1, 1893), 294.

<sup>2</sup>Connoisseur, "New York Pencilings," Arts for America 5 (March 1896), 57.

<sup>3</sup>George Inness, Jr., Life, Art and Letters of George Inness (New York: Century Co., 1917), 124.

<sup>4</sup>[William] T[homas] Evans, "Fads and Fashions in Art," Art Collector 9, no. 8 (April 15, 1899), 186.

That Evans did not always subscribe to this view is suggested by the remarks about Still Life by the Spanish artist "Olivade" which appeared in the sales catalogue of his foreign holdings: "A hare, recently shot, is suspended by the hinder leg to a kitchen wall, its head resting on the floor. A lemon, an onion and a head of garlic, the other concomitants to the ragout, are distributed about the floor. Without any special attempt at arrangement the artist has produced, by the vivid realism of his color and textures, painted in full light and without the advantageous aid of effective contrast, a picture whose interest and value are independent of the commonplace materials of which it is composed. The fur of the hare is particularly successful in treatment"; see Catalogue of Foreign Paintings being the Private Collections of the late Bernhard Stern New York and of William T. Evans Jersey City [his entire collection of foreign works] to be absolutely sold by auction . . . . (American Art Galleries, New York, March 6, 1890), 62. Shortly after the 1890 sale of his foreign paintings Evans began to collect American art exclusively. For lists of his holdings of American art, which included landscape, marine, and figure paintings, but no still lifes, see Catalogue of American Paintings belonging to William T. Evans to be sold at unreserved public sale at Chickering Hall (intro. by Charles De Kay, American Art Galleries, New York, January 31-February 2, 1900); American Paintings: Collection of William T. Evans (Wentworth Manor, Montclair, N.J., October 1902); American Paintings from the Collection of Mr. William T. Evans (National Arts Club, New York, November 8-18, 1906); Catalogue of an Exhibition of American Paintings From the Collection of Mr. William T. Evans of Montclair, N.J. (Art Gallery of the Free Public Library, Newark, N.J., December 7, 1910-January 15, 1911); and Illustrated Catalogue of the Collection of American Paintings formed by the widely known amateur William T. Evans, Esq. of New York to be sold at unrestricted public sale (text by Dana H. Carroll, American Art Galleries, New York, March 26-April 2, 1913).

<sup>5</sup>See William H. Goodyear, "Recent American Art" in Renaissance and Modern Art (New York: Flood and Vincent, Chautauqua Century Press, 1894); Sadakichi Hartmann, A History of American Art (Boston: L. C. Page, 1901); Charles H[enry] Caffin, American Masters of Painting (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1902);

Charles H[enry] Caffin, The Story of American Painting (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1907); Samuel Isham, The History of American Painting (New York: Macmillan Co.; London: Macmillan & Co., 1905); J[oseph] Walker McSpadden, Famous Painters of America (New York: T. Y. Crowell & Co., 1907); Royal Cortissoz, American Artists (New York, London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923); Suzanne LaFollette, Art in America (New York and London: Harper & Bros., 1929); Grace Irwin, Trail-Blazers of American Art (New York and London: Harper & Bros., 1930); Eugen Neuhaus, The History and Ideals of American Art (Stanford University, Cal.: Stanford University Press, London: H. Milford, Oxford University Press, 1931).

Remarkably, for the recently resurrected trompe l'oeil painter Otis Kaye (1885-1974), at least, Harnett's spirit was alive and well. Nowhere is that more clear than in Kaye's painting Breakout (Private collection), dated 1930, which includes an envelope sent by "messrs. Haberle, Harnett, Peto" from their lofty residence atop "Olympus St." Kaye is informatively discussed in Bruce W. Chambers, "Old Money: American Trompe L'Oeii Images of Currency," exh. cat. (New York: Berry-Hill Galleries, 1988), 85-94, 117-18.

<sup>6</sup>"Painting as our Grandfathers Knew It," Art Digest 11, no. 5 (May 1, 1937), 8.

<sup>7</sup>Edith Gregor Halpert, intro. "Nature-Vivre" by William M. Harnett, exh. cat. (New York: Downtown Gallery, 1939), n.p.

<sup>8</sup>Edward Alden Jewell, "Works By Harnett On Exhibition; Edith Halpert, Director of the Downtown Gallery, Brings Canvases From France," New York Times 19 April 1939, 19. In "Attractions in the Galleries," New York Sun 22 April 1939, 10, the sardonic observer was even less taken by Halpert's hype, but was no less given to discussing technique and style at the expense of content: "Capitalizing on the noisy reception that has been given to the surrealists, such as Salvador Dali and Pierre Roy, a large part of whose methods consists in a 'deceive-the-eye' realism, the Downtown Gallery, has resurrected the work of the American, William M. Harnett, who used to paint 'deceive-the-eye' pictures that deceived everybody and which commanded high prices. The difference between the American artist and the two Parisians is that the latter incorporate psycho-analysis into their compositions and the first-named never heard of the word. Dali pretends to paint the wild psuedo [sic]-realities of dreamland and Pierre Roy cultivates a waking fantasy in which a pleasant sort of insanity is suggested by the weird still-lifes he arranges; but William M. Harnett practices straight legerdemain and endeavors just to fool your eye and very often succeeds." Although a reporter for the Springfield Sunday Union and Republican expressed some skepticism about Halpert's view of the status of Surrealism in America ("Whether or not one agrees that surrealism is the vanguard of American art today, Harnett's paintings are a worthwhile addition to the native tradition"), he nonetheless quoted her interpretation in full; see "Another American Ancestor Is Painter W. M. Harnett," Springfield Sunday Union and Republican 23

April 1939, 6E.

<sup>9</sup>"Harnett Resurrected from the Shadows," Art Digest 13, no. 15 (May 1, 1939), 7. See also "Harnett Abstracts," New York World-Telegram 22 April 1939, 12: "William M. Harnett, though born in Ireland (some experts still insist Philadelphia), practiced the painting profession in America, and in the nineteenth century. And yet his work is amazingly close in spirit to Dutchmen of the seventeenth century and French surrealists of today. Pierre Roy, whom we spotted at the gallery deeply engrossed in the show, is the Frenchman whose work they most vividly recall. In them are the same meticulous draughtsmanship, the same imaginative juxtaposition of unrelated objects, the same bright, realistic color and the same underlying preoccupation with abstract composition." Also, the reviewer for the Detroit News relied strongly on Halpert's press statement when the traveling exhibition Paintings by William M. Harnett stopped at the Detroit Society of Arts and Crafts in November 1939: "The beautiful quality of his realistic still life not only associates him with the old Dutch masters, but links him quite definitely with such modern realists as Dali and Pierre Roy"; see "Two Important Shows," Detroit News 19 November 1939, 20.

<sup>10</sup>"Old Scraps," Cue 7, no. 26 (April 22, 1939), 10. Old Scraps now goes by the title Old Time Letter Rack.

<sup>11</sup>M[ary] B[est], "Discarded Treasures By William Harnett," Bulletin of Smith College Museum of Art no. 20 (June 1939), 17, 19.

<sup>12</sup>Marsden Hartley, "Wm. M. Harnett, Painter of Realism" in On Art by Marsden Hartley, ed. Gail R. Scott (New York: Horizon Press, 1982), 178.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 179.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 178.

<sup>15</sup>James S. Plaut in The Sources of Modern Art, exh. cat. (Boston: Institute of Modern Art, 1939), 47.

<sup>16</sup>American Realists and Magic Realists, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1943), 20.

<sup>17</sup>Dorothy C. Miller, intro. American Realists and Magic Realists, 5.

<sup>18</sup>See John Bernard Myers, Tracking the Marvelous: A Life in the New York Art World (New York: Random House, 1983), 44.

<sup>19</sup>"Atheneum Plans Major Exhibits," Hartford Times 7 November 1931, 5. Austin's words were also reported in "Surrealisme Has Its Day At Hartford Art

Gallery," Springfield Sunday Union and Republican 15 November 1931, 6E.

<sup>20</sup>"Recognizability," Art Digest 12, no. 9 (February 1, 1938), 7. Similarly (but more sympathetically), it was noted in the Springfield Sunday Union and Republican that "Such an exhibition continues the policy of the Atheneum of showing from time to time the most recent developments in continental art so that the Hartford art public may keep itself informed on up to date artistic matters, thus permitting it to share opportunities denied most communities it is to be feared outside the metropolitan area" (see "Surrealisme Has Its Day At Hartford Art Gallery," 6E).

<sup>21</sup>JRS. [A. Everett Austin Jr. and Henry-Russell Hitchcock Jr.], intro. The Painters of Still Life, exh. cat. (Hartford, Conn.: Wadsworth Atheneum, 1938), n.p. The catalogue essay was reprinted as "Aesthetic of the Still-Life Over Four Centuries," Art News 36, no. 19 (February 5, 1938), 12-13, 23-24.

<sup>22</sup>Painters of Still Life, n.p.; "Aesthetic of the Still-Life Over Four Centuries," 13.

<sup>23</sup>Painters, n.p.; "Aesthetic," 23-24.

<sup>24</sup>Painters, n.p.; "Aesthetic," 12.

<sup>25</sup>Painters, n.p.; "Aesthetic," 12.

<sup>26</sup>No. 12 Edwaert Colyer Vanities; no. 29 David Teniers the Younger Vanities (Painters, n.p.) The former painting was lent by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; it was in their collection in the 1870s and was probably known to Harnett, as shall appear in Chapter 3.

<sup>27</sup>Quoted in Suzi Gablik, Magritte (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1976), 11.

<sup>28</sup>J[ohn] O'C[onner], Jr., "'The Trophy of the Hunt', William M. Harnett Painting Acquired for the Permanent Collection of the Carnegie Institute," Carnegie Magazine 15, no. 8 (January 1942), 246.

<sup>29</sup>Elizabeth Ellsworth Gardner, intro. Harnett Centennial Exhibition, exh. cat. (New York: Downtown Gallery, 1948), n.p.

<sup>30</sup>Alonzo Lansford, "Contrasting Harnett and His Followers," Art Digest 22, no. 14 (April 15, 1948), 15.

<sup>31</sup>Renée Arb, "Spotlight on: Harnett," Art News 47, no. 2 (April 1948), 56.

<sup>32</sup>See The Fantastic in Modern Art, exh. cat. (New York: Hugo Gallery, 1945), n.p. Also, the inside cover of View 5, no. 3 (October 1945) has the following announcement: "View: The Modern Magazine presents an exhibition of the fantastic in modern art \*place and date to be announced\* inaugurating the Hugo gallery." And, finally, the inside cover of View 5, no. 4 (November 1945) reads: "opening Thursday, November 15, 1945 at 9 P.M., the fantastic in modern art, an exhibition presented by View."

<sup>33</sup>Edouard Roditi, "William Harnett: American Necromantic," View 5, no. 4 (November 1945), i9.

<sup>34</sup>Christopher E. Fremantle, "New York Commentary," Studio 136, no. 669 (December 1948), 196.

<sup>35</sup>Discarded Treasures was listed as no. 7 in the catalogue of the Harnett Centennial Exhibition.

<sup>36</sup>John Canaday, Metropolitan Seminars in Art, Portfolio 2-Realism (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1958), 6.

<sup>37</sup>Helen Comstock, "The Connoisseur in America: The Return of Trompe L'Oeil," Connoisseur 125, no. 516 (May 1950), 114.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>39</sup>John Canaday, Mainstreams of Modern Art (New York: Simon Schuster, 1959), 527. It should be noted that Holger Cahill, in a 1953 review of Frankenstein's book After the Hunt, observed that "in the 1930s [Harnett's trompe l'oeil still life] achieved a rich renaissance of popularity because of the booming publicity around the surrealists, particularly Salvador Dali. Dealers and critics found in Harnett a forerunner of surrealism. This is in some respects a curious incident, for the surrealists shared with Harnett no more than they shared with certain contemporary academic painters, one of the best of whom was Harry Watrous, then (in the early Thirties) president of the National Academy of Design. Neither Harnett nor Watrous followed the surrealist method of putting together arrangements of unrelated and fantastic objects, nor did they indulge in the surrealists' tricks with perspective." See Holger Cahill, review of After the Hunt, by Alfred Frankenstein, Saturday Review 36 (November 7, 1953), 51.

<sup>40</sup>Donald W. Graham, Composing Pictures (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1970), 18.

<sup>41</sup>Oliver Snoddy, "William Harnett: Master of Eye-Deceiving Realism," Capuchin Annual (1976), 264, 266.

<sup>42</sup>James W. Tottis, "William Michael Harnett (1848-1892) The Social Club" in American Paintings from the Manoogian Collection, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art; Detroit Institute of Arts, 1989), 104.

<sup>43</sup>See Johanna Drucker, "Harnett, Haberle, and Peto: Visuality and Artifice among the Proto-Modern Americans," Art Bulletin 74, no. 1 (March 1992), 37-50.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 37-38.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 38.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 50.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 39, n. 5.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 38-39.

<sup>49</sup>Gerdt, Painters of the Humble Truth, 158, n. 5.

<sup>50</sup>Barbara Novak, "William Harnett: Every Object Rightly Seen" in American Painting of the Nineteenth Century (New York, Washington, London: Praeger Publishers, 1971), 230.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 234.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 223.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Wolfgang Born, Still-Life Painting in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), 33.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 31. See also Roditi, "William Harnett: American Necromantic," 19.

<sup>57</sup>Born, Still-Life Painting in America, 33.

<sup>58</sup>For better or worse, Harnett is not among the artists discussed by Born in "The Art of the Insane," Ciba Symposium 7, no. 10 (January 1946), 202-36. For the article extracted from Born's Still-Life Painting in America, see "William M. Harnett: Bachelor Artist," Magazine of Art 39, no. 6 (October 1946), 248-54.

<sup>59</sup>See Olive Bragazzi, "The Story Behind the Rediscovery of William Harnett and

John Peto by Edith Halpert and Alfred Frankenstein," American Art Journal 16, no. 2 (Spring 1984), 51-65.

<sup>60</sup>Bragazzi, *ibid.*, 58, 59. Bragazzi's article prompted a letter to the editor by John I. H. Baur, then Director Emeritus, Whitney Museum of American Art, in which he objected to "the anti-Frankenstein tone of [Bragazzi's] article" and reaffirmed "Frankenstein's remarkable feat of scholarship in separating Peto's work from that of William M. Harnett." See "Letters," American Art Journal 17, no. 1 (Winter 1985), 93.

<sup>61</sup>See Alfred Frankenstein, "Harnett, True and False," Art Bulletin 31, no. 1 (March 1949), 38-56; see also Lloyd Goodrich, "Harnett and Peto: A Note on Style," Art Bulletin 31, no. 1 (March 1949), 57-58; and Frankenstein, After the Hunt: William Harnett and Other American Still Life Painters 1870-1900 (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1953; rev. ed. 1969 and 1975).

<sup>62</sup>Frankenstein, After the Hunt, 1975, 8.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup>Frankenstein, "Illusion and Reality," Horizon 22, no. 7 (July 1979), 30.

<sup>65</sup>Frankenstein, After the Hunt, 39.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, 40-41.

<sup>67</sup>Frankenstein, "Yankee Rhyparography," Art News 69, no. 1 (March 1970), 51. Frankenstein also avoids this theme in favor of more familiar ideas in his entry on Job Lot Cheap in The Reality of Appearance: The Trompe L'Oeil Tradition in American Painting, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1970), 62, no. 27: ". . . Here Harnett begins his practice of teasing one's curiosity with carefully painted labels that cannot be read. This device vaguely suggests surrealism, and the geometry of the books suggests abstraction; it is easy to see why, when Harnett was revived by The Downtown Gallery in 1939, the press treated him as if he were a modern artist who had somehow strayed into the nineteenth century and remained there."

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, 75. See also Frankenstein, Reality of Appearance, 9: "But if there is one thing more tiresome than the criticism of still life for its alleged failure to deal with great issues--a criticism that was brought against it throughout the period of the current show--it is the effort to raise the standing of the subject by discovering that it does, after all, deal with profoundly earnest matters."

<sup>69</sup>M. L. d'Otrange Mastai, Illusion in Art: Trompe L'Oeil, A History of

Pictorial Illusionism (New York: Abaris Books, 1975), 13.

<sup>70</sup>Célestine Dars, Images of Deception: The Art of Trompe L'Oeil (Oxford: Phaidon, 1979), 63-64.

<sup>71</sup>Barbara B. Lassiter, Reynolda House American Paintings, exh. cat. (New York: Hirsch and Adler Galleries, 1971), 40.

<sup>72</sup>Lassiter, "American paintings in the Reynolda House collection," Antiques 98, no. 5 (November 1970), 763.

<sup>73</sup>George P. Tomko, Catalogue of the Roland P. Murdock Collection (Wichita, Kansas: Wichita Art Museum, 1972), 79-80.

<sup>74</sup>Carol J. Oja, "Musical Subjects in the Paintings of William Michael Harnett." unpublished Master's thesis, University of Iowa, 1976, 11-13.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>76</sup>Carol J. Oja, "The Still-Life Paintings of William Michael Harnett (Their Reflections Upon Nineteenth-Century American Musical Culture)," Musical Quarterly 63, no. 4 (October 1977), 508. See also William H. Gerds, "The bric-a-brac still life," Antiques 100, no. 5 (November 1971), 747.

<sup>77</sup>Frankenstein, "William Harnett" in The Britannica Encyclopedia of American Art (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica Educational Corporation, 1973), 269: ". . . when, in the 1930s, surrealism and abstract art caused a reevaluation of Harnett's precise, almost hallucinatory, and often fantastic style, there was little biographical information available."

<sup>78</sup>For some examples of the new interest in iconographic analysis of nineteenth-century American still-life paintings, see Andrew J. Cosentino, "Charles Bird King: An Appreciation," American Art Journal 6, no. 1 (May 1974), 58-59; Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., The Life and Works of Martin Johnson Heade (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975) 138-43; Andrew J. Cosentino, The Paintings of Charles Bird King (1785-1862), exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Collection of Fine Arts, 1977-78), 27-28, 80-82; Bruce W. Chambers, The World of David Gilmour Blythe (1815-1865), exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Collection of Fine Arts, 1980-81), 103-04.

Quite separate but related questions about iconographic meaning in American genre, landscape, marine, and portrait painting have been raised, respectively, in Donald D. Keyes, "William Sidney Mount Reconsidered; Book Review [of Alfred Frankenstein's William Sidney Mount]" American Art Review 4, no. 2 (August 1977), 116-28; Nicolai Cikovsky, Jr., "'The Ravages of the Axe': The Meaning of

the Tree Stump in Nineteenth-Century American Art," Art Bulletin 61, no. 4 (December 1979), 611-26; Robert L. McGrath, "The Tree and the Stump: Hieroglyphics of the Sacred Forest," Journal of Forest History 33, no. 2 (April 1989), 60-69; Gerald Eager, "The Iconography of the Boat in 19th-Century American Painting," Art Journal 35, no. 3 (Spring 1976), 224-30; and Roland E. Fleischer, "Emblems and Colonial American Painting," American Art Journal 20, no. 3 (1988), 2-35.

<sup>79</sup>William H. Gerdts and Russell Burke, American Still-Life Painting (New York, Washington, London: Praeger Publishers, 1971), 134.

<sup>80</sup>Gerdts, Painters of the Humble Truth, 157.

<sup>81</sup>Milton W. Brown, American Art to 1900 (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Publishers, 1977), 539.

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid.*, 540.

<sup>83</sup>John Wilmerding, Important Information Inside: The Art of John F. Peto and the Idea of Still-Life Painting in Nineteenth-Century America, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1983), 11.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*, 129-30.

<sup>86</sup>*Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>87</sup>Wilmerding, "The American Object: Still-Life Paintings" in An American Perspective: Nineteenth-Century Art from the collection of Jo Ann & Julian Ganz, Jr., exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1981), 106.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup>Gertrude Grace Siii, John Haberie, Master of Illusion, exh. cat. (Springfield, Mass.: Museum of Fine Arts, 1985), 13.

<sup>90</sup>I would like to thank Dr. Groseclose for generously providing me with a copy of her excellent paper prior to its publication.

<sup>91</sup>See Barbara S. Groseclose, "Vanity and the Artist: Some Still-Life Paintings by William Michael Harnett," 51-59.

<sup>92</sup>*Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., 57.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., 56-57.

<sup>95</sup>S[teven] N[ash], catalogue entry on Music and Literature in Painting and Sculpture from Antiquity to 1942, intro. Steven A. Nash (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1979), 289.

<sup>96</sup>See Robert F. Chirico, "John Haberle and Trompe-L'Oeil," Marsyas 19 (1978), 37-43.

<sup>97</sup>Chirico, "Language and Imagery in Late Nineteenth-Century Trompe L'Oeil," Arts Magazine 59, no. 7 (March 1985), 110.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., 113. In "Vanity and the Artist," 58-59, n. 12, Groseclose noted specifically that Job Lot Cheap is "a reworking of Jan Davidsz. de Heem's Vanitas (1628, Mauritshaus) with commercial overtones."

<sup>99</sup>This paper was read as part of the session on "Methodologies in American Art History: An Assessment" chaired by Dr. Elizabeth Johns and Dr. H. Barbara Weinberg.

<sup>100</sup>See the present author's "William Michael Harnett's The Old Cupboard Door and the Tradition of Vanitas," 51-62.

<sup>101</sup>See the present author's catalogue entry on "William M. Harnett (1848-1892); A Study Table" in Masterworks of American Art from the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, 84.

<sup>102</sup>This paper was presented as part of a session on "The Vanitas Theme in Art," Twelfth International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts, March 22, 1990, Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

<sup>103</sup>See William M. Harnett, ed. Doreen Bolger, Marc Simpson, John Wilmerding, exh. cat. (Amon Carter Museum: Fort Worth, Texas; Metropolitan Museum of Art: New York, 1992).

<sup>104</sup>Roxana Robinson, "Common Objects of Everyday Life" in William M. Harnett, 164-66. The symbolism of the horseshoe was also considered in Doreen Bolger Burke's essay on Harnett's Still Life--Violin and Music (1888) in American Paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, vol. 3, ed. Kathleen Luhrs (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art in Association with Princeton University, 1980), 111.

<sup>105</sup>See Jennifer Hardin, "The Late Years" in *ibid.*, 185-89.

<sup>106</sup>See Thayer Tolles Mickel, "Permanent Perishables: The Artist's Fruit Paintings" in *ibid.*, 214, 216.

<sup>107</sup>See the present author's "Grave Counsel: Harnett and Vanitas" in *ibid.*, 253-61.

<sup>108</sup>See Judy L. Larson's "Literary References in Harnett's Still-Life Paintings" in *ibid.*, 265-73.

<sup>109</sup>Larson, *ibid.*, 273.

<sup>110</sup>See Marc Simpson's "Harnett and Music: Many a Touching Melody" in *ibid.*, 290-91.

<sup>111</sup>See Chambers, "Old Money: American Trompe L'Oeil Images of Currency," *exh. cat.* (New York: Berry-Hill Galleries, 1988); for another enriching discussion of this topic, see Edward J. Nygren, "The Almighty Dollar: Money as a Theme in American Painting," Winterthur Portfolio 23, nos. 2/3 (Summer/Autumn 1988), 129-50.

<sup>112</sup>Chambers, "Old Money," 96.

## CHAPTER 3

THE ART OF WILLIAM M. HARNETT IN AN ALLEGORICAL CONTEXT:  
THE VANITAS AND SOME VARIATIONS IN THE 1870s

In a well-known interview of about 1889 or 1890 in the New York News, Harnett declared that, "I always group my figures, so as to try and make an artistic composition. I endeavor to make the composition tell a story."<sup>1</sup> Though subsumed within the larger context of a section covering the artist's method of selecting and painting still-life models, that statement calls into question Frankenstein's contempt for the "make-the-picture-tell-a-story trade." In the absence of clarifying comments that only the artist himself could provide, however, it is difficult to determine the precise meaning of Harnett's assertion. The interview covered many topics including the artist's early life and training, his years abroad, and some of his successes and tribulations. But nowhere did Harnett speak directly to the idea that his work contained nuances of narrative or symbolic meaning.

As a primary source this much-quoted but elusive document has been of great interest to commentators attempting to puzzle out Harnett's artistic intentions. Such a resource has the sanction of coming virtually straight from the artist himself, and this is one reason why writers have made capital of this interview from early on. However, some of Harnett's assertions in the interview are so general, and some so

ambiguous, that critics have been able to use its material to support a variety of positions. Indeed, the very headline of the article --"Painted Like Real Things; The Man Whose Pictures are a Wonder and a Puzzle"--is far from plain. It is not difficult, then, to see in this situation the conundrum described by the distinguished art historian John Pope-Hennessy:

One of the things about art history that I found puzzling from the first was that clever art historians (there were stupid ones too, of course, but a lot of them were really clever) should reach diametrically opposite conclusions on the basis of a tiny nucleus of evidence. The reason, so far as one could judge, was that the subjective element in art history was disproportionately large. If this were so, it was not only works of art that needed to be looked at in the original but art historians too, since their results were a projection of their personalities.<sup>2</sup>

(Or, perhaps, one might extend Pope-Hennessy's thought and suggest that it is also necessary to look at the questions those personalities were inclined to ask.)

In view of the frequent selective use of Harnett's words to support a broad range of critical concerns, it is necessary first to let the artist speak in full. The opening three paragraphs of the News interview presented an introduction to Harnett, followed by this lengthy autobiographical account:

My first picture was not painted, said Mr. Harnett; neither was it drawn with crayon, nor sketched with India ink, and what is more, there is no copy of it in existence. I was about 13 years old at that time, and my first picture was drawn on my slate in school. I cannot remember at this late day whether I was punished for it or not, but I probably was. My father died in Philadelphia when I was a little boy, and I was obliged to do something to help support my mother and the children. My first work was selling newspapers. After that I was an errand boy. I did not have much time to practice art, and consequently, sometimes used the time in school that belonged to other duties.

In telling you how I paint pictures from still-life models, it would be well for me to give you in brief a sketch of my early career in art, for the trials and hardships that I underwent were the sole reasons for my taking up that line of art work. Perhaps what I may say will be of some encouragement to young men

who are situated as I was, and possibly my experience may prove to them that money and friends are not wholly necessary in beginning a career as an artist.

When I was seventeen years old I began to learn the engraver's trade. I worked on steel, copper and wood, and finally developed considerable skill in engraving silverware. This latter work then became my chief occupation. In 1867, when I was 19 years old, I entered the Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts as a pupil, studying with the night class. Two years later I found work in this city, and came here to study in the National Academy of Design and take advantage of the free art school in the Cooper Institute. In this way I worked for various large jewelry firms during the day and at the art schools at night until 1875, when I gave up engraving and went wholly into painting.

Before this time, however, I passed through several experiences that had much to do with shaping my career. I was not even well to do in those days, and my tuition and art work cost as much money as I could afford to spend and I was forced to be very economical. Still I ventured to take a course of lessons from Thomas Jensen, who was at that time a famous painter of portraits. I paid him in advance and intended to finish the course, but couldn't do it. He didn't exactly say that I never would learn to paint, but he didn't offer me any encouragement. After I had studied with him ten days, I asked him how a certain fault of mine should be corrected. I shall never forget his answer.

"Young man," he said, "the whole secret of painting lies in putting right color in the right place."

The next day I went back to my old way of study. I couldn't do the things he set out for me to do the way he wanted them done. I might have attained the desired results, but never by following his methods.

The result of this discouragement was to make me work harder than ever. I felt that I was thrown on my own resources, and if I did not give a good account of my time no one was to blame but myself. I devoted more than half my days and my evenings to my art studies, only working at my trade enough to supply me with money for clothes, food, shelter, paints and canvas. Consequently I had no money to spare.

#### POVERTY DIRECTS A CHOICE.

This very poverty led to my taking up the line of painting that I have followed for the past 15 years. It came about this way. I could not afford to hire models as the other students did, and I was forced to paint my first picture from still life models. These models were a pipe and a German beer mug. After the picture was finished I sent it to the Academy and to my intense delight

it was accepted. What was more it was sold. I think it brought \$50. That was the first money I ever earned with my brush and it seemed a small fortune to me.

As I said before, I rented a studio in New York in 1875, and from that time on I made painting a profession. I stayed here for one year, and made such progress that at the end of that period I was able to go back to Philadelphia and open a studio in that city. In the three years that I was there I not only paid my expenses, but saved a few hundred dollars besides.

Now I was able to indulge in the one cherished dream of my life. I could go to Europe and pursue my studies in the home of art. I gave up my studio and sailed for England. Instead of following the example of American artists, and going direct to Paris or Germany, I decided to make London my temporary home. Accordingly, I opened a studio in that city, and remained there several months. I painted a number of pictures and sold some of them, but my success was not marked until an old acquaintance, whom I had known in Philadelphia, visited my workshop. He was a wealthy resident of Frankfort and had bought one or two of my paintings while he was stopping in Philadelphia. He invited me to spend a few months at his home and work exclusively for him. It is needless to say that I accepted the offer.

I stopped in Frankfort for six months and filled all the orders that he gave me, until I grew impatient of the work. I wanted to go to Munich and go on with my studies. Every time I hinted of leaving Frankfort my friend suggested a new order, and it took some time and considerable obstinacy on my part to finally get away. At last I reached Munich, which was my home during the next four years. When I visited the art galleries and studios in this city I had even a poorer opinion of myself than I had before. I wanted to do such work as the other young artists were doing, and I wanted to follow instructions of older painters. But I had the same difficulty I experienced with Mr. Jemsen [sic]. I could not attain the desired results by using the methods they taught. After making repeated trials I became discouraged and went back to my own original way of working.

During the four years I lived in Munich I did very well, comparatively speaking. I sold pictures to American travelers, Germans, Frenchmen and even Englishmen were numbered among the purchasers.

#### A SALON TRIUMPH.

In 1884, I determined to test the merits of my work. I decided to discover whether the line of work I had been pursuing had or had not artistic merit. Some of the Munich professors and students had criticised [sic] me severely, and

I wanted to refer the question of my ability as a painter to a higher court. Accordingly, I went to Paris and spent three months painting one picture.

I put into it the best work I was capable of. I called it 'After the Hunt.' It is now on exhibition in this city and a reproduction of it in India ink accompanies this article. After it was finished I sent it to the salon and it was accepted. That was not all. M. Louis Enault, the famous French critic, who annually published a book in which he gives reproductions of 40 paintings from the current salon, included my picture among those [sic] he chose for that year. After the exhibition I remained six months in Paris, and while I was there I sent several pictures to England. One of them, a 10x14 inch painting of a sheet of music, vase and some books, was accepted by the Royal Academy in London, and was hung on a line between pictures of Sir John Millais and Luke Fields [sic]. It was bought by George Richardson, R.A., who urged me to come to London and make that city my home. But I was homesick. All the money I could have made would not have compensated me for a longer stay abroad, and consequently I gathered together my belongings and came back to New York. Here I was astonished to find that my work sold better than I had anticipated. This has been my home ever since.

In this sketch of my life, with its struggles and its victories, I have given you a fair idea of the hard work that is necessary for a friendless boy to undergo before he becomes recognized. Art is not an easy mistress, and those who win her favors must work patiently and strive persistently.

#### CHOOSING STILL LIFE MODELS.

Now, let me tell you something about the painting of pictures from still life models. I always group my figures, so as to try and make an artistic composition. I endeavor to make the composition tell a story. The chief difficulty I have found has not been the grouping of my models, but their choice. To find a subject that paints well is not an easy task. As a rule, new things do not paint well. New silon [sic] does not look well in a picture. I want my models to have the mellowing effect of age. For instance, some old and most new ivory paints like bone. From other pieces I can get the rich effect that age and usage gives to it--a soft tint that harmonizes well with the tone of the painting.

New models selected without judgment as to their painting qualities, would be utterly devoid of picturesqueness, and would mar the effect of the painting beyond all hope of reparation.

Let me illustrate what I mean by referring to my Salon painting, 'After the Hunt.' Take for instance the handle of the old sword that is suspended from the

door. The ivory has a particularly mellow tint. Had I chosen a sword with an ivory handle of a different tint the tone of the picture would have been ruined.

In painting from still life I do not closely imitate nature. Many points I leave out and many I add. Some models are only suggestions. Take the flute in one of the accompanying illustrations. The flute that served as a model is not exactly like the one in the picture. The ivory was not on the flute at all, and the silver effects for the keys and bands I got from a bright silver dollar. The gold band on the pipe was painted from a new gold coin. The whole effect in still life painting comes from its tone, and the nearer one attains perfection, the more realistic the effect will be.

#### ARRESTED FOR COUNTERFEITING.

Several years ago I had an experience that is far more amusing to recollect than it was to pass through, and illustrates the peculiar hardships that a still life painter sometimes undergoes when he makes an unlucky choice of a model. I painted three United States notes on panels. They were old bills, frayed at the edges and full of creases, and I painted them life-size.

A few days after, one of them was exhibited in this city, and had attracted several notices from the daily newspapers. I received a call from two well-dressed men at my studio.

While one of them was asking my name, the other was suspiciously poking his cane into the corners of my room, back of my models and under the shelves. 'Have you got any more of them here?' he asked, after he had finished a hasty search.

'More of what?' I replied.

'Those counterfeits!' he answered.

Then the other detective, for both were Special Treasury Officers, explained their mission. I was suspected of turning out counterfeit bank notes and they had come to arrest me and seize whatever illegal property they could find. They were very polite but extremely firm and I went down-town with them to Chief Drummond's office.

I explained to the chief how I had happened to do the work and I showed him the harmless nature of it. Harmless though it was, it was clearly against the law, and I was let go with a warning not to paint any more life-like representations of the national currency--a warning it is almost needless to say that was conscientiously heeded.

#### PROHIBITION THAT DIDN'T PROHIBIT.

With the exception of two finished portrait sketches all of my art work has been in the still life line. There is rather an interesting story connected with these two sketches. I painted them in Munich, and of all the life studies that I made these were the only ones that I finished. I attached little value to them and kept them on the walls of my studio chiefly as a reminder of my student days.

One day in this city a dealer called on me, and, catching a glimpse of my studies, asked their price. I told him they were not for sale. He offered me \$10 apiece for them, and I refused it.

A few days later he called again and offered me \$20 apiece which I also refused.

He called several times after this, apparently upon other business, but always managed to suggest these studies and ask me to fix a price on them. Becoming tired of his importunities, I concluded, one day, that I would put a stop to his haggling by putting a prohibitory [sic] price on the two pictures. Accordingly, I told him he could have them for \$100. To my surprise, he gave me a check and carried them off with him.

I had almost forgotten the circumstances when, several months later, he called again.

'I had a picture sale the other day,' he said, 'and do you know how much I got for your two studies.'

I told him I did not.

'Well,' he went on, 'one of them brought \$600 and the other \$400.'

To say that I was surprised would express it mildly; and had I believed that he was telling the truth, I would have even been pained.<sup>3</sup>

Certainly, this interview, as interesting for its omissions and distortions as for what it states, has provided expository possibilities that are most compelling to commentators. And quite a number of critics and scholars have taken the text of the interview as a reliable guide to analysis of Harnett's art. It is therefore revealing to note the passages deemed crucial guides for critical analysis. These are considerably less varied than might be supposed.

Consider, for example, Edward Taylor Snow's tribute to Harnett's memory which first appeared in November 1892 and then reappeared in two later lectures.<sup>4</sup> In

the later versions, published in February 1893 as the introduction to the Executrix's Sale Catalogue of Exquisite Examples in Still Life being Oil Paintings By the Late William Michael Harnett (the Birch catalogue for short) and in April 1893 as articles in American Catholic Historical Researches and Griffin's Journal, Snow appropriated the notion that, "Mr. Harnett always grouped his models so as to make an artistic composition--he endeavored to make the composition tell a story."<sup>5</sup> But this view of Harnett's artistic concerns is found sandwiched rather oddly between an account of the counterfeiting charge against the artist and the statement, "before painting the objects he would make a finished lead pencil drawing, with minute details."<sup>6</sup>

When faced with the incongruous nature of this paragraph many years later, Edith Gregor Halpert, in her introduction to the 1939 exhibition "Nature-Vivre" by William M. Harnett, chose simply to include rather than to ponder Snow's arbitrary juxtaposition of unrelated statements. In all probability, Halpert was too preoccupied with "more contemporary considerations"<sup>7</sup> to notice the enigma. In any event, quite a remarkable number of extracts were taken from the interview on the heels of Halpert's footwork. With only one exception--Edouard Roditi's somewhat quirky essay on Harnett in View--critical writers in the 1940s drew upon the following passage:

In painting from still life I do not closely imitate nature. Many points I leave out and many I add. Some models are only suggestions. . . . The whole effect in still life painting comes from its tone, and the nearer one attains perfection, the more realistic the effect will be.<sup>8</sup>

There was no attempt to reconcile the seeming inconsistency in this sequence in Harnett's strategem. Rather, as it appeared, the selected quotation would seem to

support faddish suggestions linking Harnett to contemporary artists such as Pierre Roy and Salvador Dali, specifically in regard to his use of realistic effects to elaborate imaginative impulses. Those critics who celebrated the oracular nature of Harnett's work invariably presented the passage in that abridged form, perhaps in the belief that the missing portion (to follow) was at best superfluous:

. . . Take the flute in one of the accompanying illustrations. The flute that served as a model is not exactly like the one in the picture. The ivory was not on the flute at all, and the silver effects for the key and bands I got from a bright silver dollar. The gold band on the pipe was painted from a new gold coin. . . .<sup>9</sup>

It is only toward the 1970s, after Barbara Novak presented Harnett as an artist in the "romantic tradition of Thomas Cole" rather than a "slavish imitator,"<sup>10</sup> that his comment, "I endeavor to make the picture tell a story," was revived. This passage was subsequently employed by art historians to force the argument about Harnett's concern with subject matter. Unlike Snow's reading of the line, commentary by several writers, including the present author, more or less took Harnett's avowal at face value.<sup>11</sup> And yet the fact remains that on the basis of the News interview it is exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to answer the fundamental question, Did Harnett select and manipulate his still-life models not only for aesthetic and formal reasons but also, in certain cases, as a means of conveying structures of meaning? It seems clear that the answer to such a question resides not within Harnett's interview but within a broader historical framework.

Harnett's motivation in 1876 to take for his subject a vanitas is not known, but given his personal and religious background the idea ought not seem strange.

Harnett's father, Garrett Harnett, and his mother, Honora ("Hannah") Holland, emigrated from County Cork, Ireland, when William Michael was one year old. The Harnett family settled in Philadelphia, where William Michael attended Saint Mary's Parochial School and later the Zane Street Grammar School. The Philadelphia in which Harnett grew up, and to which he returned after a brush with painting and the art world in New York in the early 1870s, had long been accustomed to still-life specialists. And so Harnett was on traditional ground when at the outset of his career he took to this aspect of the painter's art. According to Harnett's account, he had adopted the subject of the pipe and mug because he "could not afford to hire models as the other students did,"<sup>12</sup> and he augmented his subject matter in these early years by producing a moderate stock of fruit and vegetable pictures. Upon his return to Philadelphia to open a studio in 1876, Harnett's fund of artistic alternatives may have been stimulated by the great Centennial International Exhibition. Although Harnett himself had intended to show a fruit picture, one may speculate that his fascination with the subject of vanitas might have been provoked by his witnessing a host of contemporary depictions of the theme (and it is by no means certain that any of them were still lifes) in the Centennial's art exhibits.<sup>13</sup> Of course, a public that was awe-struck by the giant Corliss steam engine in Machinery Hall was not bound to admire the old-fashioned comments on man's mortality and transient existence which could be found at the Centennial Exhibition. But to Harnett the vanitas must have seemed a natural and sanctioned topic.

One may even conjecture that his inclination toward the subject of vanitas

was set before that time, possibly established in childhood or youth. To be sure, knowledge of death and mourning had surrounded him from early on. Not only did he grow up during the tragic and disillusioning period of the Civil War, but he lost his father when he was a child, and his older brother, Patrick, died in 1873, when William Michael was a young man of twenty-five. It seems reasonable to infer that the teachings of the Catholic Church provided him with comfort, and contributed to his moralistic outlook. Certainly Harnett knew the Bible and the significance of the vanitas in Christian tradition.

Whatever the decision that ultimately moved Harnett to address the vanitas, it is of interest--although he did not advertise the fact in the News interview--that he was to become a member of two Irish Catholic organizations in Philadelphia. Martin J. O. Griffin, the editor of American Catholic Historical Researches, reminisced about Harnett's presence in the late 1870s at gatherings of the Catholic Philopatrian Literary Institute,<sup>14</sup> which was founded in 1850 by the Reverend Edward J. Sourin, a parish priest at Saint Mary's. In 1890, while he was residing in New York, Harnett became a member of the Philadelphia branch of the Society of the Friendly Sons of Saint Patrick, or Hibernian Society, probably at the behest of his patron (and fellow Catholic Philopatrian) Peter S. Dooner.<sup>15</sup> As might be expected, in Harnett's obituary in the Philadelphia Times a quotation from a friend eulogistically exclaimed that, "his was the noblest character I ever knew. He lived the life of a perfect Christian, a gentleman, a saint."<sup>16</sup> American Catholic Historical Researches remembered him as "A Philadelphia Catholic Artist," and there does seem to be something of the artist's

acknowledged religiosity in his plans for a painting of a carved ivory crucifix. It was reported after Harnett's death that his intention was to present the finished picture as a gift to Saint Patrick's Cathedral in New York.<sup>17</sup> However, there is nothing in these facts and suppositions which necessarily mandated that Harnett deal with the theme of vanitas.

At this point, then, we cannot say with certainty what prompted Harnett's ventures into paintings with metaphoric or symbolic content. But it is indisputable that by 1876 he had produced a still life that was meant to function on an allegorical level. It was in this year that Harnett painted the first of his three straightforward memento mori, Mortality and Immortality (Fig. 11), which he followed up within the next few years with Memento Mori--"To This Favour" (Fig. 15) and To This Favor--A Thought From Shakespeare (Fig. 16), both painted in 1879. To be sure, the subject of the memento mori--"remember that you must die"--was well-established in America when Harnett first depicted it in 1876. A landmark in the representation of this theme was Captain Thomas Smith's Self-Portrait of about 1680-90 (Fig. 18), in which the artist assimilated into American painting the human skull as a reminder of death. Of course, memento mori were familiar enough in New England funerary sculpture of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>18</sup> And, as in so many Puritan epitaphs, Smith spelled out the implication of the skull in verses:

Why, why should I the World be minding  
 therein a World of Evils Finding  
 Then Farwell World: Farwell thy Jarres  
 thy Joise, thy Toies, thy Wiles, thy Warrs  
 Truth Sounds Retreat: I am not sorye.  
 The Eternal Draws to him my heart

By Faith (which can thy Force Subvert)  
 To Crowne me (after Grace) with Glory.  
 TS [monogram].

For the most part, however, "death's grim grim face" (to borrow a phrase from the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Puritan minister Edward Taylor) was not such an agreeable image for sitters, and portraits like Smith's are rare.

The memento mori, however, died hard. Although they are not numerous, examples of memento mori still life are found in American art after the eighteenth century, as shall appear. And, in spite of their scarcity, it is clear that nineteenth-century American audiences were invited to contemplate the meaning behind these didactic images. Thus, for example, the entry on an "emblematic Picture of Life and Death" by the Dutchman Pieter Peuteman (1650-92) in the Catalogue of M. Paff's Gallery of Paintings, which was published in New York in 1812, provides an explicit description of the artist's "emblematical Picture of Mortality, representing human Skulls and Bones, surrounded with rich Gems, Musical Instruments, Books, old Pamphlets, &c. expressive of the vanity of subjunary pleasures and enjoyments."<sup>19</sup> A key sequence in the phraseology of vanitas in the Paff catalogue survived in the title of Cephas Thompson's (1775-1856) picture Skull and Bones, which was exhibited at the South-Carolina Academy of Fine Arts in a show subtitled "The Fine Arts are the Proper Amusements of the Virtuous."<sup>20</sup> The picture is now unfortunately lost; but when an artist identified as "Thompson," presumably Cephas, had a Skull and Bones shown in Providence, Rhode Island, in 1829, his entry was accompanied in the exhibition catalogue with a stanza from the English poet George Noel Gordon Byron,

also known as Lord Byron, that was directly in touch with the vanitas tradition:

Yes, this was once ambitions airy hall,  
The dome of thought, the palace of the soul!  
Behold through each lack-lustre, eyeless hole,  
The gay recess of wisdom and wit.<sup>21</sup>

Vanitas still-life subjects in America were not confined to the early nineteenth century. A subsequent example by an obscure painter named Caroline H. Hayden found its way into the Fair of the Hartford County (Connecticut) Agricultural Society in 1852. No actual use of the word vanitas or memento mori was made, but under the title Still Life the catalogue implicitly referred to these topics. The description read, "Books, Skull, Hour-Glass, &c.," a phrase that sounds the vocabulary of vanitas almost automatically.<sup>22</sup> It seems reasonable to infer that the subject of the Belgian artist Petrus van Schendel's (1806-70) Midnight reflections on a Skull, exhibited in the picture gallery of the Crystal Palace in New York in 1853,<sup>23</sup> also conveyed the futility of earthly existence. The lack of any visual record or written description of Hayden's Still Life and van Schendel's Midnight reflections on a Skull, however, makes interpretation only a matter of conjecture. But Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel The Marble Faun, first published in 1860, reminds us that the meaning of the death's head was familiar well into the mid-nineteenth century, for at one point in the romance an alabaster carving of the human skull was invoked as a "hideous emblem" that resonated with warning.<sup>24</sup>

It is interesting to note that The Marble Faun, as Hawthorne informed his readers, "was sketched out during a residence . . . in Italy" in the late 1850s where he was closely associated with Cephas Thompson's eldest son and pupil, the painter

Cephas Giovanni Thompson (1809-88).<sup>25</sup> And, in tune with the poetic gloss attached to what may have been the elder Thompson's Skull and Bones in the catalogue of paintings in the 1829 exhibition in Providence, the character Donatello in The Marble Faun explains that his "forefathers, being a cheerful race of men in their natural disposition, found it needful to have the skull often before their eyes, because they dearly loved life and its enjoyments, and hated the very thought of death."<sup>26</sup> Indeed, in 1880 in the Art Gallery of Daniel W. Powers in Rochester, New York, a painting entitled RESPICE FINEM, "Look to the End" was read in the same spirit. The subject was described in the catalogue of the Powers collection in the following terms: "Female figure, nearly nude, warning against the pleasures of the senses by pointing to a skull on the table near her, under which is the above legend 'Respice Finem.'"<sup>27</sup>

Although the death's head was a constant and recurring motif in the iconography of vanitas still life, the subject is evident in a variety of settings without the symbol of the skull. The most celebrated example in early nineteenth-century American art that did not employ the human skull (and which shall be discussed in the following chapter as a forerunner of Harnett's The Old Cupboard Door) is Charles Bird King's (1785-1862) Poor Artist's Cupboard of about 1815 (Fig. 19).<sup>28</sup> A somewhat less refined approach to the vanitas theme is seen a half century after King's Poor Artist's Cupboard in two sets of pendants by the highly individual David Gilmour Blythe (1815-65); the first set is known as Youth and Old Age (1865; Dr. and Mrs. David Ray Vilsack, Pittsburgh) and the second as Joy of Youth and Joy of Old Age (c. 1865; New York, Mr. and Mrs. George A. Stern).<sup>29</sup> As compared to

King's painting, in which allegorical meaning is successively modified and enriched, Blythe would seem to be more concerned with presenting an uncomplicated pictorial elegy on the passage of time. Where King wielded classical learning, irony, and humor in his broadside against American Philistinism, Blythe relied upon plain symbols in his surprisingly conventional approach to the subject of transience and the inexorable end of life on earth. Note, for example, in Poor Artist's Cupboard the copy of Thomas Campbell's poem Pleasures of Hope, its spine exposed and pages dog-eared, although it was originally published in 1800--no more than about fifteen years before King composed his painting. By contrast, amid the litter of both Old Age and Joy of Old Age, Blythe used the more prosaic image of a worn Bible. Nevertheless, despite the differences in these works both King and Blythe were ranging within the accepted bounds of the vanitas tradition. Just as elements in King's Poor Artist's Cupboard comment on the futility of the artist's ambition and the ultimate destruction of material things, the tables in Blythe's paintings Old Age and Joy of Old Age are set with commonplace motifs that bear a strong and unmistakable memento mori flavor. Here, only a decade or so before Harnett painted his first memento mori, aged frailty and the end of life is conveyed by a nearly empty hourglass, a guttered candlestick, a walking stick, a sealed letter, and an old Bible.

It would be an exaggeration to suggest that allegories of vanity with or without the human skull were a dominant theme in American art. But it is evident from the examples given above that this admonitory subject survived, if not flourished, in America for over two hundred years. In addition to the allegorical still

lives by King and Blythe, and the memento mori pictures of less familiar nineteenth-century artists such as Cephas Thompson and Caroline H. Hayden, skull pictures appeared in the last quarter of the century in the work of Harnett's contemporaries, Alexander Pope (1829-1924), Louis Maurer (1832-1932), and Thomas Henry Hope (1832-1926). There is no direct written evidence to connect the memento mori painted by Pope (Fig. 20) or Maurer (Fig. 21) directly to Harnett's influence. But Hope, who as a student at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia from the late 1860s to the early 1880s would have known paintings by his younger contemporary,<sup>30</sup> executed an undated Memento Mori (Fig. 22) which seems to follow directly upon Harnett's 1879 Memento Mori--"To This Favour" in mode and composition. In any case, the three memento mori by Harnett and the isolated examples by Pope, Maurer, and Hope can be taken as comment on the persistence of this time-honored theme.

Accordingly, the significance of the skull as a silent but rather obvious reminder of death was made explicit in the title of a painting by Charles Yardley Turner (1850-1918), An Emblem of Mortality (Fig. 23), which was exhibited at the National Academy of Design in 1888. It depicts an elderly man gazing down at a death's head as if he were peering into a crystal ball. The skull also shaped expectations in word as well as image, as on the cover of Florence Folsom's Love-Lyrics (Fig. 24), a volume of poetry published in 1899. The cover of this book was embellished with a crude white skull and a butterfly which were obviously intended to be read as symbols of the mortality of the body and immortality of the soul,

respectively, for it was also inscribed with the following quatrain:

From eyeless sockets  
Lifes grim jests I see  
On sunlit wings I soar  
Near God to be.<sup>31</sup>

To be sure, representation of the human skull as a symbol of death had been part and parcel of the vanitas tradition in European art for centuries, and was familiar enough in European artistic circles of the late nineteenth century. Contemporary with the death's heads by Harnett, Pope, Hope, and Maurer, as William H. Gerdts and Russell Burke have noted, the skull found expression in the work of European artists such as Paul Cézanne, the Swiss-born Arnold Böcklin (1827-1901), and the German Lovis Corinth (1858-1925).<sup>32</sup> To this transatlantic list of artists who employed the skull in the course of the last third of the nineteenth century should be added the German Hans Thoma (1839-1924), the Viennese-born Carl Schuch (1846-1903), the Belgian James Ensor (1860-1949), and the Russian Vassilii Vassilievich Vereshchagin (1842-1904). Vereshchagin, however, went far beyond the representation of a single skull (or even a composition of several skulls as found in the work of Cézanne and Ensor) in his The Apotheosis of War of 1871 (Moscow, Tretyakov Gallery), choosing instead to depict a mountain of human skulls in the midst of a desolate landscape. Nonetheless, the moral lesson of Vereshchagin's gruesome image was underscored by a simple message inscribed on the frame: "To all great conquerors--past, present, and future."<sup>33</sup> It is not, of course, suggested that all these artists shared aims or tastes. Portrayals of the skull motif varied widely in style and dramatic circumstance, as is evident in a comparison of Harnett's Memento

Mori--"To This Favour" and Cézanne's Pyramid of Skulls (1898-1900; Zurich, Private collection) or even Bocklin's Self-Portrait with Death as Fiddler (1872; Berlin, Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz) and Corinth's Self-Portrait with Skeleton (1896; Munich, Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus). But for all this diversity, it is clear that centuries of artistic and literary tradition had accustomed nineteenth-century painters, no matter what their stylistic niche, to consider the skull in terms of death and the vanity of earthly life.<sup>34</sup>

While making this claim, it is also clear to this writer that it is easy to lump together and blur distinctions between the subspecies populating the vanitas landscape. Indeed, a danger in using an assigned title of a Harnett as a medium for analysis is that a modern label can neatly tuck a painting into the wrong exegetical bed, and thereby obscure the notion of what sort of a message a picture was meant to project. The title, Mortality and Immortality, for example, which evokes the hope of endless existence or lasting fame, apparently dates from 1939 when, under the auspices of The Downtown Gallery, the picture was exhibited under that name in a nationwide tour which began in Detroit at the Society of Arts and Crafts.<sup>35</sup> However, this painting is, presumably, the one catalogued as Life and Death in the Harnett memorial exhibition of 1892 at Earle's Gallery in Philadelphia.<sup>36</sup> The effect that the inaccurate modern title Mortality and Immortality exercises upon interpretation of the painting has been considered recently by Barbara S. Groseclose.

In discussing the problem of "what the name is called," to use the words of the White Knight in Lewis Carroll's Through the Looking Glass, Groseclose reasoned

that the title Life and Death, as opposed to the presentive connotation of the label Mortality and Immortality, "endows the imagery with a different message, one more neutral, even deterministic. . . . In contrast to death as departure, death as extinction is suggested here."<sup>37</sup> Indeed, however much motifs such as the death's head may bear on the general message of the painting, the primary meaning is mordantly conveyed by Harnett's composition. Here, on the left of a table covered with sheet music, a violin, a bow, and a rose, a small group of books are prominently crowned with a human skull. It is worth quoting Groseclose's delicious analysis of this arrangement, a description which preserves something of the jocular vein in Harnett's art. "With the bare teeth of a skull's rictal grin overlapping the volume's spine," she wrote, "death devours literature. The implication is that man's creative achievements, like his mortal existence, come to nothing."<sup>38</sup>

There is little doubt that Harnett was familiar with the traditional vanitas still life in which objects were used to invite meditation on the vanity and transience of earthly existence. Although Mortality and Immortality, his earliest vanitas picture, is dated 1876, several years before he traveled to Europe, such works by the Old Masters were readily accessible to the artist in New York. For example, the recently established Metropolitan Museum of Art contained among its collection of Old Masters an elaborate still life attributed to Cesar van Everdingen, now given to Evert Collier, entitled Vanitas (Fig. 25).<sup>39</sup> This work was on display throughout the 1870s and it seems quite probable that the painting was known to Harnett. In it, books, writing materials, and a globe were used to represent the futility of intellectual

pursuits; musical instruments and sheet music to denote the transience of sensual pleasures; precious objects such as jewelry, coins, opulent glassware, and an elaborate metal vessel to symbolize the vanity of wealth; and a skull, timepiece, and a snuffed-out oil lamp to summon reflections on the unrelenting passage of time. With such a title as Vanitas, it seems certain that Harnett would have recognized the collection of objects in Collier's creation as highly symbolic (even though the moralistic content of the painting did not capture the attention of either A. Everett Austin Jr. or Henry-Russell Hitchcock Jr. when it was shown as Vanities in The Painters of Still Life exhibition at the Wadsworth Atheneum in 1938).<sup>40</sup>

It also should be noted that there are similarities between Mortality and Immortality and Collier's Vanitas that support the contention that Harnett conceived his picture in accordance with the idea of "death as extinction." For example, just as the texts in Collier's work have a literal relevance to the theme of vanitas, the sheet music in Harnett's painting, an arrangement of "Con te li prendi" (Take them with you) from Vincenzo Bellini's opera Norma, is perfectly in keeping with the mortuary tone of the title Life and Death. The torment of illicit love and sexual betrayal from which Norma suffers continues until the end of the opera when she, and her unfaithful lover Pollione, elect to die. Also, Collier passed the violin's bow between the strings and the waist of the instrument to represent its loss from practical utility--an arrangement analogous to that in Harnett's picture in which, as Groseclose thoughtfully observed, the "violin has been placed with touching finality atop the bow."<sup>41</sup> In addition, the volume at the edge of the table in Mortality and Immortality

lies open, like some of the books in Cellier's Vanitas, and its pages appear in a fanned design, suspended as if in a vacuum. The sharply illuminated page that stands perfectly upright invites us toward a consideration of its existence as part of the transient, perishable world, not only because of its curiously transfixed appearance--which posits a reader who opened the text and then abruptly departed--but also because its far edge is placed adjacent to the left canine of the ominous and ravenous skull. The inference seems clear: an unseen but implied human presence has suddenly left off his reading, quite probably for the last time.

Harnett returned to the outright rendition of the vanitas in 1879 with his Memento Mori--"To This Favour" and To This Favor--A Thought From Shakespeare, both of which have modern analytic titles. Like Mortality and Immortality, these two paintings insist upon the vanity of human effort. Both works consist of time-honored pictorial references to vanitas, such as skulls, guttered candlesticks, old books, and, in the case of Memento Mori--"To This Favour", an hourglass that is intended to remind us, in the words of the seventeenth-century English poet George Herbert, "That flesh is but the glasse, which holds the dust / That measures all our time . . . ." In both examples the underlying message is made legible by a quotation--inscribed on the inside cover of a torn book in Memento Mori--"To This Favour" and on a ragged sheet of paper in To This Favor--A Thought From Shakespeare--from Shakespeare's Hamlet (Act 5, Scene 1): "Now get you to my lady's chamber, and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come."

Significantly, in both Memento Mori--"To This Favour" and To This

Favor--A Thought from Shakespeare, Harnett dangles the message over the table's edge, making it reach out to the spectator in a gesture that is at once precarious and foreboding, and that prevents the image from appearing too far removed from real experience. Given the "mordant wit," as Groseclose aptly described it, of Mortality and Immortality, it is not surprising to find a serious pun inhabiting the two memento mori painted in 1879. As opposed to the roughly frontal view of the skull in Mortality and Immortality, in Memento Mori--"To This Favour" and To This Favor--A Thought from Shakespeare Harnett turned each skull at an oblique angle to the picture plane, illuminating the bony cavity of the eye socket closest to the viewer in both works. Notwithstanding Harnett's interest in deceptions of the eye, we are allowed to see the configuration of bone at the back of the socket nearest the viewer which gives the impression that the skulls, though eyeless, are winking at us. It is perhaps a sign, a half-mocking gesture of complicity that invites the audience to recognize the relevance of the moral of both paintings. The underlying message that oblivion is near is made the more prominent in Memento Mori--"To This Favour" by Harnett's compositional acumen. The viewer is led first to Shakespeare Tragedies and the skull, either by way of the dangling cover and mustard-yellow edges of the pages of a recumbent book, or through the angular folds in the green table cover, and then to a small volume leaning against Shakespeare's work, which extends backward at a sharp angle toward the darkness of an underground vault.

In each work, then, through a combination of iconographic detail and compelling illusionism, and with a suggestion of rueful irony, Harnett confronts the

viewer in direct and immediate terms with tokens of the transience of life and the vanity of earthly accomplishment. In both paintings, Harnett seems to be presenting us with thoughts of death, not life. To be sure, even the endeavors of Shakespeare are made to seem no more enduring than the paper they are printed on, for the presentation of his celebrated words on a dangling cover and a tattered page have the ironic effect of reminding the viewer of the vanity of fame. Despite an intimation in the modern title To This Favor--A Thought From Shakespeare that the writer's thoughts and authority will endure forever, in the cosmic order eventually the last text of the author's writings will perish and even the name Shakespeare will disappear. (It should be noted, however, that in the short term, the regard for Shakespeare and the popularity of his works show no signs of waning.)

This grave counsel could be found not only in the text of Hamlet but purposively engaged in critical commentaries such as Henry Green's Shakespeare and the Emblem Writers, published in 1870. Green's discussion of the proverb EX MAXIMO MINIMUM (Out of the greatest the least), illustrated by a 1555 emblem with a human skull (Fig. 26), took up those lines in Hamlet, and made it abundantly clear that the skull bore a significant burden of symbolic meaning.<sup>42</sup> One might wonder if it was perhaps through Green's book that this passage came to Harnett's attention. But, of course, the artist's interest in Hamlet could have been stimulated by any number of different sources. The nineteenth-century reader was introduced to Hamlet early on by William Holmes McGuffey in several editions of his McGuffey's Eclectic Reader,<sup>43</sup> and a steady stream of scholarly books and articles generated

further interest in the play.<sup>44</sup> The vogue for Hamlet was also reflected on the stage where Shakespeare's popular story was performed by most of the leading actors of the nineteenth century.<sup>45</sup> It is little wonder that in Mark Twain's Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, "the duke" describes Hamlet's soliloquy with these words: "Hamlet's soliloquy, you know; the most celebrated thing in Shakespeare. Ah, it's sublime, sublime! Always fetches the house. I haven't got it in the book—I've only got one volume—but I reckon I can piece it out from memory."<sup>46</sup>

While we have been emphasizing the artist's pictures with skulls, we should also consider that Harnett's focus on this motif may have been but one of his approaches to the subject of vanitas. Much of the iconography in the 1878 painting Music and Literature (Fig. 27), for example, is also adapted, with some emendations, from the vast repertoire of vanitas imagery. Harnett eliminated the death's head but could have made up for it by employing a virtual catalogue of references to human vanity and transience: the extinguished candle, the musical instrument, sheet music, writing implements, and a pile of books (including one lying open at the front edge of the table with fanned pages and a red book mark that was clearly derived from a similar motif in Mortality and Immortality). Although the picture was readily admired in one contemporary account, the significance of this combination of motifs seems to have eluded the observer. But the writer was concerned with promoting the aesthetic appreciation of books, and it should come as no surprise that he would choose to engage the "pictorial aspect" of Harnett's subject matter. He commented:

The book indeed is as much an artistic property to the painter as the wig is to the paid player of the stage. He has continual use for it. In portraits he secures

a thoughtful expression from the subject by its utilization. It gives a lightsome touch of color to an interior where such is needful. In exclusively still-life pictures the book has been dealt with in art at its most important decorative phase. W. M. Harnett, who paints with such marvellous conciseness and absolute perspective fidelity still-life pictures, utilizes a book or books as a leading or at least an important feature in almost every composition he undertakes. In his "Music and Literature" there is a vellum book that is painted perfectly and other books in leather and cloth, these being really the dominant objects, although the pen and inkstand, the music, the ivory and ebony of the flute and the silver candlestick are treated with equal artistic exactness.<sup>47</sup>

The commentator did not fail to grasp Harnett's strong feeling for the texture of objects, and his appraisal may be taken as representing the aesthetic and formal mode of viewing paintings such as Music and Literature that was a commonplace from Harnett's time up nearly to the present. In connection with the artist's now-lost painting Old Friends, the writer likewise noted that "in its details [the painting] is most happily balanced." He continued: "The torn vellum cover of the book is original in conception and the grouping of the other books artistic, and grouped in a manner calculated to tax the painter's skill to the utmost."<sup>48</sup> All too easily overlooked is the sense that the shambling composition of objects and precarious stacking of books in Music and Literature--in keeping with the disordered appearance of Dutch seventeenth-century vanitas still life--might attest to the essential worthlessness of material existence and fugacity of human arrangements. Indeed, Harnett's depiction of every minute detail would seem to reveal with clarity and immediacy the illusory appeal of this life.

This approach may have served Harnett in other pictures from the late 1870s, most notably in Job Lot Cheap (Fig. 13), painted in 1878. And by way of explaining the connection between Job Lot Cheap and contemporary notions of vanity,

we might do well to summon Washington Irving's story "The Mutability of Literature" in The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon (1819-20). Irving's story provides an explicit description of the vanity of worldly achievement and the paradox of fame which is applicable not only to Job Lot Cheap, but also to works such as Memento Mori--"To This Favour" and To This Favor--A Thought From Shakespeare. This delightful story is prefaced with an epigraph by Shakespeare's contemporary, William Drummond of Hawthornden, a gloss that begins with these lines: "I know that all beneath the moon decays, / And what by mortals in this world is brought, / In time's great period shall return to nought. . . ."49 Irving's tale is, accordingly, filled with an abundance of vanitas imagery, and his concern with this theme is made plain as we are led to the library of Westminster Abbey "through a portal rich with the crumbling sculpture of former ages, which opened upon a gloomy passage leading to the chapter-house and the chamber in which doomsday-book is deposited."<sup>50</sup> Soon after the protagonist ascends into the library he finds himself falling under its spell, and as time whiles away he begins to reflect on his surroundings.

As I looked around upon the old volumes in their mouldering covers, thus ranged on the shelves, and apparently never disturbed in their repose, I could not but consider the library a kind of literary catacomb, where authors, like mummies, are piously entombed, and left to blacken and moulder in dusty oblivion.

How much, thought I, has each of these volumes, now thrust aside with such indifference, cost some aching head! . . . And all for what? to occupy an inch of dusty shelf,-- to have the title of their works read now and then in a future age, by some drowsy churchman or casual straggler like myself; and in another age to be lost, even to remembrance. Such is the amount of this boasted immortality. A mere temporary rumor, a local sound; like the tone of that bell which has just tolled among these towers, filling the ear for a moment--lingering transiently in echo--and then passing away like a thing that was not!<sup>51</sup>

Lapsing into a private reverie, Irving's protagonist makes the acquaintance of "an exceedingly fluent, conversable little tome."<sup>52</sup> He carries on a lively discussion with this somewhat irritable old quarto on the mutable nature of books and literary tradition. When the old volume, which for its part was given to complaints of neglect and lack of appreciation, lays claim to an enduring, paradigmatic literary style, the protagonist retorts:

Unless thought can be committed to something more permanent and unchangeable than such a medium, even thought must share the fate of everything else, and fall into decay. This should serve as a check upon the vanity and exultation of the most popular writer.<sup>53</sup>

And when the little quarto discovers from its partner in discussion that the mutability of literature and the English language has devastated the reputations of not only its lesser predecessors but also its great contemporaries, it is left to make a derisory inquiry about "the fate of an author who was making some noise just as I left the world" but whose "reputation . . . was considered quite temporary."

The learned shook their heads at him, for he was a poor half-educated varlet, that knew little of Latin, and nothing of Greek, and had been obliged to run the country for deer-stealing. I think his name was Shakspeare [*sic*]. I presume he soon sunk into oblivion.<sup>54</sup>

Much to its surprise and amusement, the wheezy quarto is informed that "it is owing to that very man that the literature of his period has experienced a duration beyond the ordinary term of English literature."<sup>55</sup> But while Irving's protagonist maintains that "of all writers he has the best chance for immortality," he is compelled to admit, albeit reluctantly, that Shakespeare is "gradually assuming the tint of age, and his whole form is overrun by a profusion of commentators, who, like clambering vines

and creepers, almost bury the noble plant that upholds them."<sup>56</sup>

If this passage reflects by its verdant imagery a visual impression reminiscent of the overgrown and broken column that looms in the foreground of Thomas Cole's (1801-48) The Course of Empire: Desolation (1832-36; New-York Historical Society)—a motif symptomatic of both the mutability and vanity of human achievement—Irving's story as a whole forms a picture especially applicable to the mutable world of Harnett's Job Lot Cheap. Harnett's painting is not, of course, keyed to "The Mutability of Literature." In the story the reader is left to ruminate in "a lofty antique hall" with books "arranged in carved oaken cases."<sup>57</sup> In Job Lot Cheap, on the other hand, the viewer is invited to browse through a heap of books stacked with seeming haphazardness atop a plain wooden crate. There is "a solitary table" in the library of Westminster Abbey, but the reader finds only "two or three books on it, an inkstand without ink, and a few pens parched by long disuse."<sup>58</sup> And, while Irving alluded in his story to a "pyramid of books" which has "long since fallen" and Harnett arranged his books in a kind of weathered pyramid, the author's reference is to the prodigious output of a single writer, Robert Groteste of Lincoln, not to the literary efforts of a host of authors as appear in Harnett's painting.<sup>59</sup>

But like Irving's "The Mutability of Literature," Harnett's Job Lot Cheap may be an expression of mutability and a reproach to human vanity. Although Frankenstein likened the painting to a "cubist abstraction,"<sup>60</sup> the picture seems to contain a moralizing dimension which would place it squarely in the tradition, as Groseclose recently observed, of such vanitas paintings as Jan Davidsz. de Heem's

(1606-83/84) Still Life with Books of 1628.<sup>61</sup> The sign "Job Lot Cheap"--which provides the work with its title--appears in the lower left-hand corner of the painting, and is written, as if in diluted black ink, on the inside cover of an old dismembered book which stands against the side of the crate. The text of the message, in conjunction with a printed notice pasted to the opposite side of the crate which reads "Just Publishe[d]," represents a mixture of wit and irony that appear not infrequently in Harnett's art. Indeed, in the same clipping in which the discussion of Music and Literature appeared, the anonymous writer acknowledged Harnett's humor and underscored the painting's ironic twist. "That is a fine group of rare old books," he wrote, "that the painter has subtitled facetiously: 'Job Lot, cheap.' Some of them are very valuable works that have been loaned for this purpose, . . ."<sup>62</sup> Thus the notices "Job Lot Cheap" and "Just Publishe[d]" loom even larger in a painting in which the other labels are presented as only half-seen interludes. Between them, these two bracing signs mark a remorseless and--in keeping with the outlook of the Greek philosopher Democritus who laughs at human vanity--comical reversal of the motive force of the books themselves, in particular the "rare" and "valuable" ones. "Not wholly useless, though no longer used," as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote in his poem "My Books,"<sup>63</sup> they may have provided Harnett an overt means of telling the viewer that Job Lot Cheap is an instance of vanitas which draws on nothing less than the rise and fall of literary achievement, and the disquieting notion that the kingdom of learning comes to nothing.<sup>64</sup>

It would follow that a discarded volume of Cyclopaedia Americana/Vol. II

is found not only wedged in amid the pile of books as if it were a tumbled domino, but moored between a worn copy of the Odyssey/Homer and a lavish edition of The Arabian Nights. In the studied haphazardness of Job Lot Cheap these books are by their very nature, not to mention their central position, near the heart of Harnett's subject. The Arabian Nights, for example, boasts a lush green cover which is scrolled with an ornate design, but however rich its imprint this once-admired book has declined in its position from a bookcase to a second-hand bookstand, and even its original authors are no longer known. And indeed, in Harnett's time it was generally felt that The Arabian Nights was no more the original conception of a single or known author than the Odyssey was the oral handiwork of a poet named Homer. What emerges from such browsing is that these books, rather than mere discards, bear watching as statements of the inexorable fate of human learning and cultural achievement. As such they represent the lot of cultures past and present, places east and west, and worlds Old and New. (In view of the fact that the Odyssey and The Arabian Nights are set topsy-turvy, they might also point up the course of human civilization as a continual series of ups and downs.) Since a masterpiece once ascribed to the great Homer has been consigned to the job lot we are perhaps challenged to recognize that the reputation of the Greek epic poet, whose time-honored efforts scaled the heights of fame and success, is now assailed by doubts and, like the heap of books on the crate, will slowly come to dust. Neither periods of history, nor places, nor individuals are exempt. That inflexible judgment resounds in a sixteenth-century emblem verse by Geoffrey Whitney that traffics in historic

civilizations, distant ages, and famous lives, and which refers among others to the figure of Homer. Significantly, it appeared in a reissue of Whitney's A Choice of Emblemes that was published in 1866:

Times change, and we doe alter in the same,  
And in one staye, there nothing stil maye bee:  
What Monarches greate, that wanne the chiefest fame,  
But stealinge time, their birthe, and deathe, did see:  
Firste NESTOR suck'd, and HOMER first was taughte,  
Bothe famous once, yet both to dust are broughte.

Wee first are younge, and then to age wee yeelede,  
Then flit awaye, as we had not bene borne:  
No wight so stronge, but time doth winne the feeelde,  
Yea wonders once, are out of memorie worne:  
This AEgypt spires, and Babell, sawe in fine,  
When they did mounte, and when they did decline.<sup>65</sup>

To the degree that the "orphan book-cover"--to use Frankenstein's description of the sign "Job Lot Cheap"<sup>66</sup>--may be read as cannibalized rather than attached to its binding, it not improbably signals the last course in the cycle of the mutability of literature. This foxed and battered casualty has a frayed corner and worn edges; it also has the number "25" inscribed in its corner as if to suggest that the second-hand book dealer had previously conceded its saleability only at a bargain rate. (It would appear that the artist was, nonetheless, in a more charitable mood than his friend Peto who went so far as to devaluate the books in his Discarded Treasures (Fig. 9)--a painting based on Harnett's example--to just "10 cents EACH.") In any case, with an anonymity that complements the unknown authors of The Arabian Nights, as well as some of the lesser lights assembled on the flat top of the crate, the sign leaning portentously beneath them seems to presage the inevitable

collapse of books and learning into a sort of literary desolation.

Less jocose in tone than Job Lot Cheap, but not without its ironic jests, is Harnett's Bard of Avon (Fig. 28), also painted in 1878. In this picture a bust of the revered author is placed in an improbable spot atop two books (rather like the sculpted bases of both Chauncey B. Ives's bust of the architect Ithiel Town [1842; Yale University Art Gallery] and Edward S. Bartholomew's bust of Barnard Shipp [c. 1860s; National Academy of Design, New York]).<sup>67</sup> The book on the bottom of this assembly is Shakespeare's Tragedies/Illustrated, and on top of it is a volume with the partially veiled title Co[. . .] Shakespeare. It is reasonable to assume that the missing characters of the latter book, obscured by the white barbs of the quill pen which is balanced against it, are the last six letters of the word "Comedies," for such a title would play a symmetrical and necessarily important role in the painting. Harnett obliges us to notice that the title Co[medies] Shakespeare, together with Shakespeare's Tragedies, is essential to completing a modal balance between Comedy and Tragedy on which Shakespeare's bust, not to say his very reputation, might comfortably rest. The compass of the Bard's genius is extended--as is, not coincidentally, the stability of the pyramidal composition--by a third book, Shakespeare's Sonnets, which Harnett leans diagonally against the base of the sculpture at the left.

In this context, it may be claimed that Harnett intended the terrestrial globe, partially concealed by the left shoulder of the bust on the right, as a punning reference to the Globe playhouse, thus alluding to the theater in which Shakespeare's plays were staged. He also hung a heavy maroon curtain behind this ensemble as if

to suggest a suitably theatrical setting. One could also plausibly suggest that Harnett intended the bright illumination on the bust to cast Shakespeare in the spotlight, or, rather, in the limelight of global fame.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, the notion of Shakespeare's everlasting fame is promoted further by the very existence of the bust portrait. In contrast to the skull that symbolized extinction in Mortality and Immortality, the well-preserved bust in Bard of Avon, in which mortal flesh and bone have been turned to a semblance of stone, suggests survival. Indeed, the image of the bard basking in glory is what one would expect from a painting called A Tribute to Shakespeare--the title of a Harnett shown at Earle's Gallery in 1892, and which is in all probability Bard of Avon.<sup>69</sup>

Harnett's apparent admiration for Shakespeare's genius is scarcely surprising in a painter so given to literary motifs. But the choice of this theme may also have been influenced by the 300th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth in 1864 which led to a remarkable burst of pictorial activity devoted to the Bard in America, not to mention in England, in the 1860s and 1870s. Just as themes from Shakespeare were very popular among painters and sculptors, so posthumous portraits of the author were common. One can cite an impressive list of examples in American art from this period, among them paintings by Thomas Sully (1783-1872), William Page (1811-85), Henry Peters Gray (1819-77), and Seymour Joseph Guy (1824-1910), and sculptures by Page, Richard S. Greenough (1819-1904), William Wetmore Story (1819-95), John Quincy Adams Ward (1830-1910), and Giovanni Turini (1841-99).<sup>70</sup> But Harnett's Bard of Avon is not simply another "tribute to [Shakespeare's]

illustrious and immortal memory" (to borrow a phrase from the dedication of Ward's bronze statue of Shakespeare in New York's Central Park in 1872).<sup>71</sup> It is also possible, given Harnett's concerns at this time with the theme of vanitas and variations upon it, to perceive the existence of a second, gloomier motive.

Thus, at another level Harnett's Bard of Avon, despite its original title, can be interpreted as a painting in which the artist once again had the vanity of fame in mind, and appropriated the image of Shakespeare to symbolize "the bubble reputation." It should be noted that this phrase comes from the famous passage in Shakespeare's As You Like It that begins, "All the world's a stage," and that Henry Green included the whole speech in his book Shakespeare and the Emblem Writers, published in 1870.<sup>72</sup> Nor should one overlook the fact that almost immediately after presenting this speech in his book Green proceeded to make an appeal to artists, encouraging their interest in Shakespeare and the emblematic mode:

The pencil and skill alone are wanting to multiply the Emblems for the Poetic Ideas which abound in Shakespeare's dramas. His thoughts and their combinations are in general so clothed with life and with other elements of beauty, that materials for pictures exist in all parts of his writings. . . . therefore, we might draw many a sketch, and finish many a picture from this unexhausted fountain, . . .<sup>73</sup>

Whatever Harnett's interest in Green's book or advice (and it is not certain that he was acquainted with it), the nature of the bust itself suggests that the painter may have had a deeper level of meaning in mind.

It is important to note that the portrait of the Bard on which Harnett's painted image depends comes from Josiah Wedgwood's bust of Shakespeare, after a plaster cast by John Cheere of 1774 (Fig. 29).<sup>74</sup> While it is true that the bust was

produced primarily in black basaltes, a material, according to Wedgwood, "having the appearance of antique bronze,"<sup>75</sup> it may not be irrelevant that a small stock of models were made in Carrara ware, an unglazed porcelain that resembles marble.<sup>76</sup> We are prompted to wonder if Harnett had access to one of these rare Carrara-ware busts, or if his painted bust of Shakespeare was adapted from a black basaltes model, by far the more popular and accessible form.<sup>77</sup> The question seems worth raising not only because of the rarity of the Carrara specimen, but because a pictorial transmutation of black basaltes to biscuit could reflect Harnett's assertion that "In painting from still life I do not closely imitate nature." As we may recall, by way of explaining this statement, he declared,

Some models are only suggestions. . . . The flute that served as a model [in one of Harnett's paintings] is not exactly like the one in the picture. The ivory was not on the flute at all, and the silver effects for the keys and bands I got from a bright silver dollar. The gold band on the pipe was painted from a new gold coin. . . .<sup>78</sup>

And so it is not entirely out of order to wonder whether Harnett had a black basaltes model on hand, and rather than imitating the appearance of black basaltes or bronze purposely chose to simulate cold white marble or, at the very least, biscuit. Whatever the answer, his depiction of an untinted bust, while suppressing any suggestion of a naturalistic presence, makes Shakespeare appear literally as white as death. At first sight the head, whatever its make up, might appear pristine and enduring; but whether in marble or Carrara ware the bust carries the implication that it is mutable and subject to the ravages of time. The poet William Cullen Bryant, in his oration at the aforementioned dedication of Ward's statue of Shakespeare, pointed

indirectly to just such a material consideration: "It has been cast in bronze," he said, "a material indestructible by time, in the hope that perchance it may last as long as [Shakespeare's] writings."<sup>79</sup> But in Harnett's Bard of Avon the bust, with its colorless face and blanked eyes turned to the audience, is painted with minimal obeisance as comparatively frail stone or biscuit. Not surprisingly, like other mortals absorbed by worldly concerns, the marmoreal image of Shakespeare in Harnett's work wears on its face an expression of intense and grave solemnity.

To be sure, it has been suggested that the globe behind the bust--which shows the contours of Africa, Arabia, and India--"refers to the worldwide spread of the dramatist's reputation."<sup>80</sup> In view of the long-standing British colonial presence in India, it is not by chance that nineteenth-century translations and adaptations of Shakespeare's work appeared in various Indian languages.<sup>81</sup> But while A Shakespeare Bibliography: The Catalogue of the Birmingham Shakespeare Library, the most distinguished collection of its kind, can produce a list of works that stretches literally from A to Z--from Afrikaans and Arabic to Yoruba and Zulu--no African or Arabic versions show up until the twentieth century.<sup>82</sup> If Harnett went to some lengths to describe each of these territories then it could not have been for the express purpose of charting the vastness of Shakespeare's reputation. On the contrary, not only are the British Isles and the Continent hidden behind the Bard's left shoulder, but North America would be entirely lost from sight in an unobstructed view of the globe. This point of view may owe something to a 1564 emblem by Johannes Sambucus (1531-84) that was republished in 1870 as an illustration to Green's Shakespeare and the

Emblem Writers. In the emblem "Symbols of the parts of the Inhabited Earth" (Fig. 30), the continents of Europe, Africa, and Asia (as far east as India) are depicted, but North and South America are omitted altogether. Green notes that while the Bard referred to the West Indies in some of his plays, "in agreement with the map of Sambucus, . . . Shakespeare on other occasions ignores America and all its western neighbours."<sup>83</sup> It may not be out of place, therefore, to read the globe in Harnett's painting as a cryptic jest which, to a well-informed audience, makes a parody of the limitations and, given Shakespeare's mythic stature in America, the uncertainty of fame.

The mocking quality of the globe may be further amplified by taking into account its traditional role as a symbol of the vanity of worldly concerns. As we have noted before, it was in just such a role that the terrestrial globe, not to mention the quill pen without an inkwell, appeared in Collier's Vanitas, which Harnett could have seen at The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Conceivably, the fleeting nature of Shakespeare's worldly fame is underlined by the green cloth spread like a lush mantle over the table. Quite apart from its significance as a Christian symbol of hope, the color green can allude to the world not only as garden but as cemetery, and as such set the tone for pastoral paintings of the admonitory subject Et in Arcadia ego (Even in Arcadia, I Death, hold sway). This elegiac Old World theme was of little interest to American landscape painters, but a copy of one of the French artist Nicolas Poussin's (1594-1665) two versions of Et in Arcadia Ego could be found in the Philadelphia home of James L. Claghorn, a banker and prominent collector.<sup>84</sup>

Although Harnett may not have known this painting, similar epitaphs in green were provided in American art by way of the motif of the tree stump. For example, the sawn stump appeared in such unembrowned compositions as Cole's The Course of Empire: The Arcadian or Pastoral State of 1832-36 (Fig. 31)--in which it was also cut off suggestively by the edge of the picture frame--and The Pic-Nic of 1846 (Brooklyn Museum). In these idyllic works, the stump not only furnished raw material about the future of verdant nature but alluded to death in the pastoral realm. It is worth noting that Frederic Edwin Church's tribute to his teacher, To the Memory of Cole (1848; Des Moines Women's Club--Hoyt Sherman Place, Des Moines, Iowa), presented an open field of green that included at the left foreground a cut stump as an emblem of mortality.<sup>85</sup>

In the realm of poetry and literature, death was set off against the color green in Walt Whitman's rich and impressive work Leaves of Grass in which, among other things, grass suggested to the poet "the beautiful uncut hair of graves."<sup>86</sup> Although Whitman proceeded to claim that "The smallest sprout shows there is really no death," his American contemporary Elizabeth Stoddard called up the "'glory of the grass'" in the "Unreturning," a poem about the death of a child. For Stoddard, the frailty of human life was inconsistent with the hopefulness of green for "he, who once was growing with the grass, / And blooming with the flowers, my little son, / Fell, withered--dead, nor has revived again!"<sup>87</sup> It is not inappropriate to note that the book of Isaiah offers a case where verdant nature is a prefiguration of the landscape of vanitas: "All flesh is grass, / And all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the

field; / The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; / Because the spirit of the Lord  
bloweth upon it; / Surely the people is grass."<sup>88</sup>

In keeping with Harnett's delineation of the fact of mortality, it should be recalled that the quill pen, presumably the Bard's own, is unaccompanied by an inkwell. The poignant image of the quill pen without an inkwell presents us with the idea of the cessation of activity emerging from death. And we cannot help but notice that the maroon curtain is pulled aside to reveal not a fixed object or wall but enveloping darkness. Also by way of the convention of vanitas, the volumes of Shakespeare, which embrace the body of his work, show inevitable signs of wear and tear. In this sense, Harnett's Bard of Avon may be seen as a reminder of the temporal nature of even the most honored earthly achievements. If it is true that Harnett was struck by the overwhelming reverence for Shakespeare, a reverence that was intellectual, emotional, and artistic all at once, it may be argued also that he chose not to follow the party line. In the face of esteem that had elevated Shakespeare to a lofty Olympian status, Harnett seems to be maintaining a more down-to-earth philosophical premise and moral attitude. He may have deliberately chosen Shakespeare as the object, the sacred cow, of this rumination, using his unparalleled fame to emphasize that not even the Bard will merit special exemption from oblivion, though he might warrant deferment.

The fact of mortality is a theme that Harnett may have developed further in The Social Club (Fig. 3) of 1879, the painting that the art critic of the New-York Daily Tribune, which was then Clarence Cook, reprehended as an example of "merely

external painting."<sup>89</sup> Rather than constituting a literal-minded and parochial vision of the smoker's world, The Social Club, as in the case of other works painted in the late 1870s, may hint at the transience of human existence and the ephemeral nature of earthly pleasures. In this instance, unlike Mortality and Immortality in which the implied human presence seems to have departed only moments before, Harnett seems to present the uninsufflated pipes and matches as if they were a collection of requiescent objects that had been left abandoned for some indeterminate period of time. Although the "social club" may be called to order yet again, no live sparks or wisps of smoke--devices common in Harnett's art--are employed to point up a person (or persons) who had suddenly disappeared from sight. And yet, while Harnett avoided the suggestion of the odor of burning, he nevertheless infused The Social Club with the smell of tobacco, an odor redolent of worldly pleasures.

To be sure, in Harnett's day scenes of smoking or representations of smoking paraphernalia not only aroused the senses but urged meditation on the vanity of human pursuits, much as they had in the seventeenth century. It is worth citing, for example, a seventeenth-century song about tobacco that was widely known in the nineteenth century, although invariably altered. This version appeared in 1875 in E. R. Billings's Tobacco: Its History, Varieties, Culture, Manufacture and Commerce:

Tobacco's but an Indian weed,  
Grows green at morn, cut down at eve,  
It shows our decay, we are but clay;  
Think of this when you smoke tobacco.

The pipe, that is so lily white,  
Wherein so many take delight,  
Is broke with a touch--man's life is such;

Think of this when you smoke tobacco.

The pipe, that is so foul within,  
Shews how man's soul is stained with sin,  
And then the fire it doth require;  
Think of this when you smoke tobacco.

The ashes that are left behind  
Do serve to put us all in mind  
That unto dust return we must;  
Think of this when you smoke tobacco.

The smoke, that does so high ascend,  
Shews us man's life must have an end,  
The Vapor's gone--man's life is done;  
Think of this when you smoke tobacco.<sup>50</sup>

The same associations can be found in Robert Eden Brown's more up-to-date poem

"My Havana Cigar," which appeared in The Play-Bill of Philadelphia in 1876.

. . . As all that is mortal is doom'd to decay:  
Then why should I sigh for Love's triumphs, so stupid,  
A Bachelor's life is the happier far--  
I ne'er was so blind as to worship blind Cupid,  
I worship alone "My Havana Cigar."

. . . And should a regret of lost honors confound me,  
My fragrant Havana I quickly invoke,  
And feel, as its incense is scattered around me,  
All human ambition will vanish in smoke:  
Thus alone in my solitude softly reclining,  
I mourn not Time's visits leave many a scar,  
Nor regret that the world's fancied joys I'm resigning,  
As I press to my lips "My Havana Cigar."<sup>91</sup>

Indeed, nowhere is the relation between tobacco and vanity more obvious than in a seventeenth-century emblem by Francis Quarles, whose works were reissued throughout the nineteenth century. In an 1861 edition of Quarles' Emblems, for example, we see a putto on a cloud of smoke contentedly puffing a pipe, and inviting

us to consider the following lines (Fig. 32):

. . . Come, burst your spleens with laughter to behold  
 A new-found vanity, which days of old  
 Ne'er knew: a vanity that has beset  
 The world, and made more slaves than Mahomet:  
 That has condemn'd us to the servile yoke  
 Of slavery, and made us slaves to smoke.  
 But stay, why tax I thus our modern times,  
 For new-born follies, and for new-born crimes?  
 Are we sole guilty, and the first age free?  
 No, they were smok'd and slav'd as well as we:  
 What's sweet-lipt honour's blast, but smoke? What's treasure,  
 But very smoke? And what more smoke than pleasure?  
 Alas! they're all but shadows, fumes and blasts;  
 That vanishes, this fades, the other wastes. . . .<sup>92</sup>

Harnett's The Social Club does not seem to be innocent of such symbolic concerns; not only because its iconographical imagery suggests as much, but because Harnett included signs that correspond directly to the allegorical theme of transience. For one thing, he introduced a wooden cigar box with an inner label in Spanish as the centerpiece of the composition (Fig. 33). Although the trademark is partially hidden by the stem of one of the clay pipes resting in the cigar box, Harnett provides us with an unobstructed view of the first seven letters which read "FLORDEL," Spanish for "flower of." While it is possible that the name suggested itself to Harnett because he had such a cigar box at hand, we should remember that the flower, being short-lived, was long familiar as an emblem of transience. The flower is viewed in just this light, for example, in Lilly Martin Spencer's We Both Must Fade (Fig. 34). Painted in 1869, Spencer's work presented a youthful-looking woman, wearing a rich satin and lace dress, standing next to a table on which sits a jewelry box and bouquet of fresh flowers. As the title suggests, her meditative gaze has been occasioned by a flower,

held lightly between her thumb and forefinger, that has begun to droop and lose some of its petals. Not the least interesting aspect of this painting is that it was exhibited in the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876 and remained on view there until after Harnett had departed for Europe.<sup>93</sup> The power of Harnett's painting to stimulate such considerations may be seen, for example, in James W. Tottis's observation that the objects in The Social Club are "arranged . . . as if they were a floral bouquet."<sup>94</sup>

It is, in part, in the sense of floral symbolism that the proper noun on the inner label, which can be read as "FLORDEL[FUMAR]," leaves its mark on the painting. The significance of this name seems to be stressed by the clay pipe in the foreground. For propped against the cigar box with the end of its stem framed by the oval design of the label, the pipe inclines to point directly to the brand name as an agent of emblematic intent (Fig. 35). If the brand name is in fact "FLORDEL[FUMAR],"<sup>95</sup> Harnett could have strengthened the symbolic allusions to transience and the vanity of life by referring not only to flowers (flor) but also, covertly, to smoke (fumar), which fades quickly away. And thus, just as the pipes and tobacco were commonly used to draw attention to the brevity of life and the transience of worldly gratifications, so the linguistic allusions to flowers and smoke could have served the same end.

Equally revealing is the brand name on the inner label in toto, "FLORDEL[FUMAR] DE L. BA[. . .]UETE H[A]BANA," which, in addition to its other associations, seems to heighten the illusory overtones of The Social Club by means of its very language. In what might be characterized as a kind of commercial

trompe l'oeil, American cigar manufacturers in the 1870s frequently adopted Spanish brand names with an eye to fooling the consumer. Billings summarizes the ploy and its shortcomings:

All the cigars made in the United States are invariably put up in imitation Havana boxes, with imitation Havana labels and brands. It is doubtful, however, whether this transparent device deceives anybody, for in accordance with the United States Internal Revenue laws, all boxes of cigars manufactured in the United States must not only bear the manufacturer's label, . . . but they must bear the United States inspector's stamp.<sup>96</sup>

And indeed when the box is inspected one finds the remnant of a blue United States Internal Revenue Stamp but no sign of the Customs Stamp that would have been reserved for a box of imported cigars. To the extent that Harnett would have us confuse a domestic for an imported cigar, or vice versa, the choice of the Spanish brand name "FLORDEL[FUMAR]" can be seen as an outgrowth of his symbolic frame of mind. Whether it is a domestic or foreign product, is real or imaginary, the Spanish brand name "FLORDEL[FUMAR]" not only echoes the symbolic consonance of the pipes and tobacco but leaves little doubt that the pleasures of smoking are illusive and open to question.

The theme of transience and man's mortality may be borne out as well in other aspects of the box and its contents. The pipes that take their place in the cigar box are laid out on a bed of loose tobacco, as if the box were a casket lined (as the Holy Writ puts it) with withered grass. Although it would be perilous to press the point, perhaps we are expected to recall the famous lines from the book of Psalms: "For my days are consumed like smoke, / And my bones are burned as a hearth. / My heart is smitten like grass, and withered."<sup>97</sup> In any case, we are prompted by the

loose pipe tobacco to consider that the first-class cigars that supposedly occupied the box, as indicated by the class mark "Flor" branded on its right side, have since been turned to dust.

Even the arrangement of the fragile pipes is suggestive of the idea of death. For The Social Club, like Harnett's memento mori, appears to be full of sly ventures that animate even its most lifeless iconographic features. In the foreground on the right, the meerschaum lies on its side and its ebonite mouthpiece extends over the edge of the tabletop, as if summoning the viewer. As Harnett's dead-pan execution draws us closer, and we move from the foreshortened stem of the meerschaum to its bowl, the dark recess of its circular rim is slowly revealed to us as if it were the eyeless hole of a death's head. Behind it on the side of the cigar box is a torn revenue stamp, a detail made particularly meaningful because the remnant of the numeral "0" not only amounts to nothing, mathematically speaking, but it also resembles a sort of low cranial vault.<sup>98</sup> By the same token, the ornamental white-face beading which bridges the zero's center void assumes the appearance of a nasal bone. Completing the contrapuntal relationship between the circle of the meerschaum's bowl and the lower right quadrant of the fragmentary zero, with its suggestion of a calvaria, frontal bone, nasal bone, and eyehole, Harnett placed a clay pipe in a diagonal alignment at the back of the cigar box. This pipe is shown with its stem ceilingward and the orbit of its hollow bowl cut off, as is the right quadrant or "eye" of the image on the stamp. Again moving across the composition, the pipes can be seen turning by degrees. On the left, the brierwood as well as the red clay pipe

behind it are turned upside down to perhaps indicate, like the symbol of the inverted torch, that the flame of life has been extinguished. This motif can be traced back to classical antiquity, but a more immediate example of the inverted torch could be found on the tomb of Shakespeare (an author of particular interest to Harnett), which figured so prominently in the nineteenth-century imagination.<sup>99</sup>

In addition to the symbolic allusions to transience in the brand name "FLORDEL[FUMAR]" and the sense of the inner label as rent by time, the cigar box could have been employed to point up other dimensions in the concept of transience. In the context of current events, the cigar box may have served as a practical reminder of the impermanence and worthlessness of earthly pleasures. As it happens, in order to prevent the sale of untaxed stamps, the Revenue Act of 1865 directed manufacturers to pack their product in new boxes of 25, 50, 100, 250 or 500 cigars each, and mandated that once the contents were sold the empty boxes could not be repacked with fresh cigars.<sup>100</sup> The significance of this legislation, according to the anonymous author of the Memorandum Relative to the unnecessary Expenditures imposed by the Treasury Regulations on Manufacturers and Dealers in Cigars, published around 1879, was that "now the boxes that have been used only for a single day are worthless, for the law forbids their second use."<sup>101</sup> Thus, Harnett's interest in the worn condition of the cigar box in The Social Club may be more than superficial. He may have considered that the box, which can be dated close to 1875,<sup>102</sup> would constitute in the minds of interested parties, such as the author of the Memorandum, a timely expression of the painting's themes of transience and worthlessness.

If the idea of vanity appears doubly in The Social Club, articulated in the images and words, it may also be dramatized and enlarged by the ironic nature of the assemblage itself. The pipes, for instance, might represent more than just the property of a single smoker or the paraphernalia of an egalitarian smoking room. Harnett gave prominence to old, well-chewed pipes of various kinds, shapes, and colors—a meerschaum with a cherry wood stem, a common white clay pipe, an elegant-looking brierwood edged with a gold collar and band, and behind it in the background on the left is a pipe of coarse red clay. Between them, they cut a wide swath. And it may not be out of place to construe these pipes in the absence of people as emblems of class divisions, embodying a whole spectrum of types, from all walks of life and all levels of social stratum. As such, the gathering of pipes of various shapes and colors in The Social Club can be interpreted as a demotic but inanimate version of the human race, all of which belongs to the same phylum and shares the common bond of death.

Such a scenario would by no means be unique in the late nineteenth century. The idea of the pipe as a good model for the study of the family of man is explicit in Daniel Wilson's Pipes and Tobacco; An Ethnographic Sketch, published in 1857. His analysis began with the following words:

In attempting to determine the elements on which to base a system of classification of the diverse types or varieties of man, there are frequently one or two prominent characteristics which, alike among ancient and modern races, appear to supply at least convenient tests of classification, while some are deserving of special consideration as indicators of more comprehensive and far-reaching principles.<sup>103</sup>

Wilson was, of course, concerned primarily with pipes, and a few lines farther in the

text admitted into evidence the view that,

Among the native products of the American continent, there is none which so strikingly distinguishes it as the tobacco plant, and the purposes to which its leaf is applied; for even were it proved that the use of it as a narcotic, and the practice of smoking its burning leaf, had originated independently in the old world, the sacred institution of the peace-pipe must still remain as the peculiar characteristic of the Red Indian of America.<sup>104</sup>

As we might infer, an ethnographic survey of smoking devices would encompass a broad and exotic range of pipes, from the calumet to the chibouk and the churchwarden to the hookah. Harnett's failure to include a wider diversity of pipes in The Social Club might be ascribed to the availability of "models." On the other hand, it also accords with the artist's presumed interest in making his moral subjects less obvious, as in the case of Job Lot Cheap, and possibly more meaningful by rendering them almost ordinary. In any event, one might go so far as to suggest that the pipes--with yellow, white, brown, and red "skins"--become elements of experience that reflect something of contemporary notions of the primary divisions of mankind. Andrew Steinmetz clearly had this metaphorical idea in mind in The Smoker's Guide, Philosopher and Friend, published in 1877, although he presented it within the frame of racial snobbery:

. . . The qualities of a good pipe . . . are due to clay, the same material out of which man, the most perfect of animals, was fashioned.

As, however, the varieties of mankind may be traced to the varieties of their primordial clay, so, in like manner, the varieties of pipes; and it appears that the Belgium clay must rank amongst pipe-clay as the Caucasian race amongst mankind.<sup>105</sup>

In Harnett's The Social Club we see overt as well as covert references to color as a classifying feature. As the wide and variable range of the pipes's colors

hint at the racial diversity of mankind, so too the words stenciled on the side of the cigar box, "Colorado Mad[u]ro," raise the issue of color. This Spanish phrase, which means "red-ripe," was used to indicate that the cigars were "medium dark," one of the standard color classifications employed by cigar manufacturers to distinguish their product. The message amplifies, or multiplies, the racial diversity that can be inferred from the assortment of pipes in the foreground. To be sure, in Harnett's day as well as ours (results of research into human evolution notwithstanding), formal theories and informal attitudes about race frequently categorized mankind by skin color. Daniel G. Brinton, Professor of Ethnology at the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia and of American Archeology and Linguistics at the University of Pennsylvania, gave an account that is quite typical of late nineteenth-century somatology. In his Races and Peoples: Lectures on the Science of Ethnography, published in 1890, Brinton declared that "the most obvious distinctions of races. . . . are unquestionably those presented by The Color."<sup>106</sup> And he added: "The black and white, the yellow, the red and the brown races, are terms far older than the science of ethnography, and have always been employed in its terminology."<sup>107</sup>

Indeed, the idea that smoking tobacco furnished an activity that bound mankind into a compact whole, regardless of social class or racial classification, runs through the latter half of the nineteenth century. For example, in Tobacco: Its History, Nature, and Effects on the Body and Mind, published in 1849 and again in 1876, Joel Shew, then a man of importance in hydropathy as well as phrenology, wrote: "Amidst fierce opposition on the one hand, and advocacy on the other, tobacco

has passed through its different phases of popular favor until at length it has become an universal favorite with the rich and poor, the high and the low, and the learned and the ignorant."<sup>108</sup> And a moment later he dramatized the point by quoting a verse that begins:

To sing the praises of that glorious weed,  
Dear to mankind, whate'er his race, his creed,  
Condition, color, dwelling or degree!  
From Zembla's snows to parched Arabia's sands,  
Loved by all lips, and common to all hands; . . .<sup>109</sup>

Alfred Henry Forrester carried the matter further still in his chapter on smoking in The Laughing Philosopher (in the Middle of the Nineteenth Century), published in 1889 under the pseudonym of Alfred Crowquill.<sup>110</sup> Here, in an illustration entitled Pipes (Fig. 36), he described a comparable vision of the unity of mankind. It shows a container encircled by a great variety of disembodied heads that not only represent a host of ethnic types smoking indigenous pipes, but brings them together in an equable and peaceable manner. Forrester, however, was not as flat-footed as Shew, and his fanciful design was not meant to be taken at face value alone. By way of calling attention to the moral that it presents, he proceeded the illustration with these words: "Kind reader! there is much hidden philosophy in this paper, if you have only the cunning to 'smoke it'--if not, the more's the pity--for it will then simply appear in your impenetrated mind as a mere 'bottle of smoke.'"<sup>111</sup>

Thus, the philosophy of smoking that appeared in the late nineteenth century could view the act of smoking, and the paraphernalia associated with that activity, as a spiritual bond between all nations and people. And while as a practice it

was more often described, consciously and otherwise, as a widespread habit that transcended racial and social classification without risking the status quo,<sup>112</sup> a fair sampling of authors testified to smoking as the course not of discrimination but of mutual destiny. When Frederick W. Fairholt addressed the sociological dimension of smoking in Tobacco: Its History and Associations in 1859, for example, he concluded that "as a comfort to the poor, as a luxury to the rich, tobacco unites all classes in a common pleasure," and then went on: "There is much deep philosophy as well as sound sense, in the emblematic design by the German artist Rethel, . . . in which the hand of Death holds the balance, and enforces the lesson that the pleasures of the king's crown and the poor man's pipe, are equal."<sup>113</sup> Fairholt's moral does not differ markedly from that found in other texts on tobacco and smoking. The same response is felt in a verse by the nineteenth-century American poet Charles Sprague entitled "To My Cigar" (which could also be found, without attribution, in Billings's book on tobacco). A passage from Sprague's poem informs us that, "From beggar's frieze to monarch's robe, / One common doom is passed; . . ."<sup>114</sup> And Steinmetz, likewise, wrote in The Smoker's Guide, Philosopher and Friend, that "tobacco [is] the universal leveller."<sup>115</sup>

Thus, it can be argued that the title The Social Club, under which Harnett's picture was exhibited at the National Academy of Design in 1879, underlines its subject and moralizes upon the message that lies at the heart of its wit. If the artist was engrossed with the idea of the transient and ephemeral nature of human existence, it is a concern that would seem to be fully embodied in this seemingly mundane

image of pipes and a cigar box--a painting that may remind us not only of the vanity of transitory pursuits but also of the common fate of all human beings.

Notwithstanding the criticism of the formidable though, perhaps, as Forrester might have it, "impenetrated" Clarence Cook, we may suppose that it is much more than an example of "merely external painting."<sup>116</sup> In The Social Club, as in other of Harnett's moral and didactic paintings of the late 1870s, Harnett appears to give fresh life to the vanitas, even while sparing the viewer the weight of additional skulls. Indeed, what pictures such as Job Lot Cheap and The Social Club may demonstrate is that from the mid 1870s "imitation" was not the sole mover among some of the artist's most ambitious paintings. Rather the dynamic motive behind these works may have been Harnett's insistence on asserting traditional allegorical subject matter with a quality of reality and a sense of immediacy.

Even if there were critics such as Cook who dismissed the artist's pictures as merely "works in which the skill of the human hand is ostentatiously displayed working in deceptive imitation of Nature,"<sup>113</sup> it may be claimed that the mimetic effects in these early paintings function in the context of illusionism and its place within the time-honored scheme of vanitas. In attempting an assessment of such works, one must bear in mind that by 1876 he had already adopted the sanctioned tradition of the vanitas--an idea still much in the air of the times--in which technical factors frequently played a crucial role. Yet for all the apparent realism of his imagery, it can be argued that Harnett attempted not only to reintegrate traditional iconographical patterns but to introduce new, hidden dynamics into his paintings.

Moreover, it would seem that Harnett on some occasions posed allegorical and moral problems far deeper than stylistic ones. In the following decade Harnett would show himself to be as interested in addressing the dramatic possibilities of allegorical subject matter, couched in a world of everyday appearances, as he was in the late 1870s.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>"Painted Like Real Things; The Man Whose Pictures are a Wonder and a Puzzle; How He Began and the Success He Has Met With--Poverty Forced Him to Earn a Living in the Line in Which He Excels," New York News, undated clipping in The Downtown Gallery Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., roll ND/27, frame 128.

<sup>2</sup>John Pope-Hennessy, quoted in "Self-Portrait Of an Art Historian as A Young Man," New York Times 8 December 1985, sect. 2, 39.

<sup>3</sup>"Painted Like Real Things," New York News, *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>The first version of Snow's essay, which appeared in Paintings of the Late W.L.M.L.Harnett On Exhibition, exh. cat. (Philadelphia: Earle's Galleries, 1892), did not include the statement in question.

<sup>5</sup>E[dward] Taylor Snow, introduction to Executrix's Sale Catalogue of Exquisite Examples in Still Life being Oil Paintings By the Late William Michael Harnett including the Furnishings of his Studio (Philadelphia: Thomas Birch's Sons, Auctioneers, February 23-24, 1893), 4; E[dward] Taylor Snow, "William Michael Harnett, A Philadelphia Catholic Artist," American Catholic Historical Researches 10, no. 2 (April 1893), 76; and "William Michael Harnett, A Philadelphia Catholic Artist," Griffin's Journal 21 (April 1, 1893), [1].

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup>Edith Gregor Halpert, "William M. Harnett," intro. "Nature-Vivre" By William M. Harnett, exh. cat. (New York: Downtown Gallery, 1939), n.p.

<sup>8</sup>See B[arbara] N[eville] Parker, "'The Old Cupboard Door' by William Michael Harnett," Bulletin of the Museum of Fine Arts 38, no. 225 (February 1940), 17; J[ohn] O'C[onner], Jr., "'The Trophy of the Hunt'; William M. Harnett Painting Acquired for the Permanent Collection of the Carnegie Institute," Carnegie Magazine 15, no. 8 (January 1942), 246; "Carnegie's Harnett," Art Digest 16, no. 14 (April 15, 1942), 19; Wolfgang Born, "William M. Harnett: Bachelor Artist," Magazine of Art 39, no. 6 (October 1946), 253; Wolfgang Born, Still-Life Painting in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), 34; "Art; Humanized Mechanization," Time 50, no. 10 (September 8, 1947), 48; Howard Devree, "1848--Harnett--1948; An American Magician of the Still-Life," New York Times 18 April 1948, 8X.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup>See Barbara Novak, "William Harnett: Every Object Rightly Seen," 229.

<sup>11</sup>See Novak, *ibid.*; Milton W. Brown, American Art to 1900, 539; and the present author's "William Michael Harnett's The Old Cupboard Door and the Tradition of Vanitas," 53.

<sup>12</sup>"Painted Like Real Things," *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup>Although Harnett is listed as exhibiting a "Fruit" picture in United States Centennial Commission, International Exhibition, 1876, Official Catalogue, vol. 3, Department of Art (Philadelphia: Published by John R. Nagle and Company, 1876), 19, no. 195, his name does not appear in subsequent catalogues.

Among the paintings included in the American section of the Centennial Exhibition was Douglas Volk's Vanity, no. 438; see *ibid.*, 24. A painting by Ludovico Accaristi titled Vanity was included in the exhibit from Italy; see United States International Exhibition Philadelphia 1876. Catalogue of the Statuary and Paintings sent by Milan's Permanent Exhibition of Fine Arts (Philadelphia, 1876), 50, no. 37. The theme was essayed in marble by the Italians Pietro Guarnerio and Francesco Barzaghi, whose sculptures, both entitled Vanity, were discussed and illustrated in Edward Strahan, The Masterpieces of the Centennial International Exhibition, vol. 1, Fine Art (Philadelphia: Gebbie & Barrie, [1876-78], 136, 144, and 145, 172, respectively. The National Museum of American Art Index to American Exhibition Catalogues; From the Beginning through the Centennial year, comp. James L. Yarnell and William H. Gerds, with Katharine Fox Stewart and Catherine Hoover Voorsanger (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1986) lists among the works exhibited at the Centennial a painting of entitled Vanity by H. Kretzschmer (vol. 3, 2063, no. 52559), and sculptures of that title by Antonio Bottinelli (vol. 1, 377, no. 8765), Guglielmo Bracony (vol. 1, 407, no. 9577), and Cesare Fantachiotti (vol. 2, 1213, no. 29923).

<sup>14</sup>See [Martin J. O. Griffin], ed. note, "William Michael Harnett, A Philadelphia Catholic Artist," American Catholic Historical Researches, 76.

<sup>15</sup>See John H[ugh] Campbell, History of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick and of the Hibernian Society for the Relief of Emigrants from Ireland. March 17, 1771-March 17, 1892 (Philadelphia: Published by the Hibernian Society, 1892), 323.

<sup>16</sup>"Harnett's Body Here; The Famous Master Painter of Studies in Still Life . . . ." Philadelphia Times 1 November 1892, 1. In the same vein, Harnett was described shortly after his death as "of exemplary life and almost saintly character" by John Hugh Campbell in History of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick and of the Hibernian Society for the Relief of Emigrants from Ireland, 423.

<sup>17</sup>See the entry for "Large Ivory Crucifix" in Executrix's Sale Catalogue, 14, no. 110.

<sup>18</sup>See Allan I. Ludwig, Graven Images: New England Stonecarving and its Symbols, 1650-1815 (Middleton, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1966), passim.

<sup>19</sup>Catalogue of M. Paff's Gallery of Paintings. No. 221, Broadway, opposite the Park, New-York May 15, 1812 (New York: Conrad Printer, 1812), 8, no. 128.

<sup>20</sup>The Second Exhibition of the South-Carolina Academy of Fine Arts. February, 1823. "The Fine Arts are the Proper Amusements of the Virtuous." (Charleston: Printed by Archibald E. Miller, No. 4 Broad Street, 1823), 5, no. 54.

<sup>21</sup>Catalogue of Pictures in the Gallery of Paintings, at the First Exhibition, Providence R. I., August 1, 1829 (Providence, n.p., 1829), 2, no. 49.

<sup>22</sup>Catalogue of the Works of Art Exhibited at The Fair of the Hartford County Agricultural Society (Hartford, Conn., n.p., 1852), 7, no. 11.

<sup>23</sup>Official Catalogue of the Pictures Contributed to The Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations, in The Picture Gallery of the Crystal Palace. First Edition (New York: G. P. Putnam & Co., Publishers, 1853), 19, no. 524.

<sup>24</sup>Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Marble Faun: or, the Romance of Monte Beni, vol. 2 (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1860), 37.

<sup>25</sup>See Clara Erskine Clement [Waters] and Laurence Hutton, Artists of the Nineteenth Century and Their Works, seventh rev. ed. (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co.; Cambridge, Mass.: Riverside Press, 1894), 289.

<sup>26</sup>Hawthorne, Marble Faun, vol. 2, 37-38.

<sup>27</sup>A Catalogue of the Paintings in the Art Gallery of D. W. Powers, Rochester, N. Y. Established in 1875. With Explanations and Sketches of Painters by C. C. Merriman (Art Gallery of D. W. Powers, Rochester, New York, 1880), no. 620. It is interesting to note that Powers's collection was described in a letter from H. Wood Sullivan to the painter Jefferson David Chalfant (1856-1931), dated October 12, 1887, as "the finest art gallery in the Country." Quoted in William H. Gerdtz, "A Trio of Violins," Art Quarterly 22, no. 4 (Winter 1959), 380.

<sup>28</sup>For a discussion of the relationship between vanitas and King's Poor Artists Cupboard, see Andrew J. Cosentino, "Charles Bird King: An Appreciation," American Art Journal 6, no. 1 (May 1974), 58-59; and Andrew J. Cosentino, The Paintings of Charles Bird King (1785-1862), exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: Published for the National Collection of Fine Arts by the Smithsonian Institution Press, 1977), 28. See also Gerdtz and Burke, American Still-Life Painting, 52-53; and the present author's, "William Michael Harnett's The Old Cupboard Door," 56; for the

association with melancholia, see the present author's, "Washington Allston's 'The Evening Hymn'," Arts Magazine 54, no. 5 (January 1980), 144.

<sup>29</sup>See Bruce W. Chambers, The World of David Gilmour Blythe (1815-1865), exh. cat., (Washington, D.C.: Published for the National Collection of Fine Arts by the Smithsonian Institution Press, 1980), 103-04, 174, 176, 181.

<sup>30</sup>See John Wilmerding, Important Information Inside: The Art of John F. Peto and the Idea of Still-Life Painting in Nineteenth-Century America, exh. cat., (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1983), 75.

<sup>31</sup>See Florence Folsom, Love-Lyrics (Boston: Idea Publishing Co., 1899), front cover.

For examples of the butterfly as a symbol of the immortality of the soul in American art, consider Erastus Dow Palmer's (1817-1904) relief sculpture Immortality (1859-60; Albany Institute, Albany, New York), and Randolph Rogers' (1825-92) The Artist's Daughter, Nora, as "The Infant Psyche" (1871; Evansville Museum of Arts and Science, Evansville, Indiana).

<sup>32</sup>See Gerdtz and Burke, American Still-Life Painting, 134.

For characteristic examples (not mentioned in the text), see Cézanne's Still Life with Skull and Candlestick (c. 1867-68; Private collection, Zurich), Young Man with a Skull (c. 1896-98; Barnes Foundation, Merion, Pa.), Three Skulls (1898-1900; Detroit Institute of Arts); Carl Schuch's Second-Hand Shop (c. 1870s; Hannover, Niedersächsischesm Landsmuseum); Hans Thoma's Self-Portrait with Love and Death (1873; Staatlichen Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe); James Ensor's Skeleton's Trying to Warm Themselves (1889; Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Tex.), Skeletons Fighting Over the Body of a Hanged Man (1891; Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp), Skeleton Painter in his Studio (c. 1896; Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp), Self-Portrait Surrounded by Masks (1899; Private collection).

<sup>33</sup>See Robert Rosenblum and H[orst] W. Janson, 19th-Century Art (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1984), 331.

<sup>34</sup>See, for example, Charles Sterling's commentary on Cézanne's skull pictures in Still Life Painting: From Antiquity to the Twentieth Century, trans. James Emmons, second rev. ed. (New York, Cambridge, Hagerstown, Philadelphia, San Francisco, London, Mexico City, Sao Paulo, Sydney: Icon Editions, Harper & Row, Publishers, 1981), 126.

<sup>35</sup>The painting was exhibited in Detroit at the Society of Arts and Crafts in November 1939; it was also listed as Mortality and Immortality in Paintings by William M. Harnett: Lent by The Downtown Gallery, New York, exh. cat., text by E. Taylor Snow and Edith Gregor Halpert (Chicago: Arts Club of Chicago, 1940) and

Paintings by William M. Harnett: Lent by The Downtown Gallery, New York, exh. cat., text by E. Taylor Snow and Edith Gregor Halpert (San Francisco: M. H. de Young Memorial Museum, 1940).

<sup>36</sup>Paintings of the Late W[.] M[.] Harnett on Exhibition, no. 6.

<sup>37</sup>Barbara S. Groseclose, "Vanity and the Artist: Some Still-Life Paintings by William Michael Harnett," 53-54.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>39</sup>Catalogue of the Pictures in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, No. 681 Fifth Avenue, In the City of New York (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1872), 33, no. 65.

<sup>40</sup>See JRS. [A. Everett Austin Jr. and Henry-Russell Hitchcock Jr.], intro. The Painters of Still Life, n.p.; see also Austin and Russell-Hitchcock, "Aesthetic of the Still-Life Over Four Centuries," 12-13.

<sup>41</sup>Groseclose, *ibid.* For a more optimistic reading of the painting's iconography and the title Life and Death, see Simpson, "Harnett and Music," 291.

<sup>42</sup>Henry Green, Shakespeare and the Emblem Writers: an exposition of their similarities of thought and expression (London: Trübner & Co., 1870), 337-39.

<sup>43</sup>For example, excerpts from Shakespeare's Hamlet can be found in McGuffey's Fifth Eclectic Reader, rev. ed. (New York, Cincinnati, Chicago: American Book Co., 1879), 328-33, and in McGuffey's Sixth Eclectic Reader, rev. ed. (New York, Cincinnati, Chicago: American Book Co., 1879), 339-40. See also Henry W. Simon, The Reading of Shakespeare in American Schools and Colleges, an historical survey (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1932), 26-27; and Esther Cloudman Dunn, Shakespeare in America (New York: Macmillan Co., 1932), 231.

<sup>44</sup>See, for example, Alfred Van Rensselaer Westfall, "American Studies of Hamlet" in American Shakespearean Criticism, 1607-1865 (New York: H. W. Wilson Co., 1939), 242-50; and Claude C. H. Williamson, Readings on The Character of Hamlet, 1661-1947 (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1950).

<sup>45</sup>See Charles H. Shattuck, Shakespeare on the American Stage: From the Hallams to Edwin Booth (Washington, D.C.: Folger Shakespeare Library, 1976), 10 (Lewis Hallam, Jr.), 17 (John Hodgkinson), 22, 25 (Thomas Abthorpe Cooper), 32 (John Kemble), 37 (Sarah Bartley), 40, 41, 69 (Edmund Kean), 45, 48-49 (Junius Brutus Booth), 55 (John Howard Payne), 59 (James Henry Hackett), 65-66 (Edwin Forrest), 68-69, 80, 82 (William Charles Macready), 98, 102 (Charles Kemble), 104-

05 (Charles Kean), 120-22 (Edward Loomis Davenport), 127-28 (John McCullough), 128, 121, 140, 145, 148 (Edmund Booth).

<sup>46</sup>Mark Twain, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (Tom Sawyer's Comrade) (New York: Charles L. Webster and Co., 1885), 178.

For a discussion of Shakespeare and the American frontier, see Dunn, "Shakespeare on the Ohio and Mississippi Frontier (1810-1850)" in Shakespeare in America, 175-204.

<sup>47</sup>Untitled and unannotated clipping in William Blemly's scrapbook, Alfred Frankenstein Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, roll 1374, frame 335.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Quoted in Washington Irving, "The Mutability of Literature: A Colloquy in Westminster Abbey" in The Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon, Gentr. (New-York: George P. Putnam, 1852), 159.

I should like to thank Barbara Babcock Millhouse, president of Reynolda House, Museum of American Art, Winston-Salem, for calling my attention to Irving's "The Mutability of Literature" and its possible relationship with Harrett's Job Lot Cheap. The results of Mrs. Millhouse's research appears in her catalogue entry on Job Lot Cheap in Charles C. Eldredge and Barbara M. Millhouse, American Originals: Selections from Reynolda House. Museum of American Art (New York: Abbeville Press; American Federation of Arts, 1990), 82-84.

<sup>50</sup>Irving, "Mutability of Literature," *ibid.*, 159-60.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, 169-70.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 163.

<sup>60</sup>Frankenstein, After the Hunt, 47.

<sup>61</sup>Groseclose, 58-59, n. 12.

<sup>62</sup>Untitled and unannotated clipping in William Blemly's scrapbook, Alfred Frankenstein Papers, *ibid.*

<sup>63</sup>Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "My Words" in The Complete Poetical Works of Longfellow (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.; Cambridge, Mass.: Riverside Press, 1893), 358.

<sup>64</sup>Harnett presented a photograph of Job Lot Cheap to his friend Edward Taylor Snow, inscribed with the tantalizing words: "To E. T. Snow, thanks for the idea, Yours Truly, William M. Harnett"; see Frankenstein, *ibid.* Although it has been the subject of speculation, what Harnett meant by "the idea" remains a mystery.

<sup>65</sup>Geffrey Whitney, A Choice of Emblemes, intro. Frank Fieler, first published in Leyden, 1586; reissued in London, 1866, ed. Henry Green (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1967), 167.

<sup>66</sup>Frankenstein, *ibid.*, 47.

<sup>67</sup>For calling my attention to these and other busts with literary foundations, I am most grateful to my colleague David Dearing, who completed a doctoral thesis on "The American Neoclassical Sculptors and Their Private Patrons in Boston" (1993) at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York.

<sup>68</sup>It may be noted, of course, that while Thomas Edison's invention of the electric incandescent lamp was still one year away when Bard of Avon was painted, limelight had been used to throw an intense beam of light on a particular part of the stage or on an actor beginning in the 1860s, and remained in use in the theater until the first decade of the twentieth century; see Theodore Fuchs, Stage Lighting (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1929), 42. For more on the history of the limelight, see Brian Legge, "Stage Lighting in the 19th Century," Tab 26, no. 3 (September 1968), 19.

<sup>69</sup>Paintings of the Late W[.] M[.] Harnett on Exhibition, no. 10.

<sup>70</sup>For a partial list of portrayals of Shakespeare by American artists, see Richard Studing, "A Survey of American Portraits of Shakespeare," Bulletin of Bibliography 42, no. 4 (December 1985), 187-92. A now-lost sculpture of Shakespeare by the Italian expatriate Giovanni Turini, which stood "in the centre of the proscenium arch"

of Booth's Theatre in New York, is mentioned in William Winter, Life and Art of Edwin Booth (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1893), 49; and in George C. D. Odell, Annals of the New York Stage, vol. 8 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), 423. The statue, unfortunately, cannot be discerned in either an engraving of the interior of Booth's Theatre which appeared on the front page of Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper 27 February 1868, 369, or in an engraving reproduced in Shattuck, Shakespeare on the American Stage, 134. Certainly Harnett would have seen several portraits of Shakespeare which were shown in the United States section of the Centennial Exhibition: a bust (no. 23) as well as a painting (no. 341) by William Page, and a marble bust (no. 16) by Eli Jacquier of Cincinnati; see United States Centennial Commission. International Exhibition, 1876, vol. 3.

It is worth mentioning here that Harnett included a folded playbill in Alas, Poor Yorick (1877; Hirschl & Adler Galleries, New York) and its replicate A Smoke Backstage (1877; Honolulu Academy of Arts) that describes a production of Hamlet. The Prince of Denmark with Edwin Booth. Based on his presentation of the letters ". . . STN . . ." on the first line of the playbill and ". . . TRE . . ." on the second, it would seem that Harnett was chronicling a performance of Shakespeare staged at the Chestnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia, although such a performance has so far eluded confirmation.

<sup>71</sup>Shakespeare. Ward's Statue in the Central Park, New York (New York: T. H. Morrell, 1873), 2.

<sup>72</sup>Green, Shakespeare and the Emblem Writers, 409.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, 410.

<sup>74</sup>For remarks on John Cheere (1709-1787) and his cast of Shakespeare, see Robin Reilly, Wedgwood, vol. 1 (New York: Stockton Press, 1989), 450-51.

<sup>75</sup>See Catalogue of cameos, intaglios, medals, bas-reliefs, busts, and small statues: with a general account of tablets, vases, ecritoires, and other ornamental and useful articles. . . . by Josiah Wedgwood (Sixth Edition, Etruria [1787]), 58.

<sup>76</sup>Reilly cites and illustrates a bust of Shakespeare in bronzed basalt which, although listed as after John Flaxman in the "1849 Price List," "appears to be a remodelled version of the bust invoiced by John Cheere in 1774"; see Wedgwood, vol. 2, 463. Reilly also cites a version from the "1859 Price List" that was produced in a Carrara-ware body; see *ibid.*, 752. Something of its rarity is reflected in what one presumes is an illustration of this model, which is a reproduction of a Wedgwood photograph rather than an actual example; see *ibid.*, 640.

<sup>77</sup>Although a contemporary of Harnett's noted that "Busts were made in red--rosso antico--in white terra cotta and cane color; and are still occasionally met with in

these bodies in small sizes," she acknowledged that "by very far the largest number were made in basalt and basalt bronzed"; see Eliza Meteyard, The Wedgwood Handbook: A Manual for Collectors (London: George Bell and Sons, 1875), 202. This view is confirmed in Robin Reilly and George Savage, The Dictionary of Wedgwood (Woodbridge, Suffolk, England: Antique Collector's Club, 1980), 63.

Also, it should be noted that portraits of Shakespeare appeared in a variety of other media. For example, Harnett's conception may have been influenced by the masthead of The Play-Bill, a circular for the Chestnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia which began publication in 1876--the year Harnett returned to that city--and that featured a depiction of Shakespeare with masks of Comedy and Tragedy. One can see the high prominent brow which the image of the Bard usually conjures to one's mind, as well as the less common feature, also found in Harnett, of the beard on the cheeks as well as the chin. Moreover, we can see in the emblematic masks in the engraving a parallel to Harnett's use of the books Shakespeare's Tragedies and Co[m]edies Shakespeare in Bard of Avon.

<sup>78</sup>Harnett is quoted in "Painted Like Real Things," *ibid.*

<sup>79</sup>Bryant quoted in Shakespeare. Ward's Statue in the Central Park, New York, 21. It is worth pointing out that "The Bryant Vase," an emblematic vessel designed in 1878 by James H. Whitehouse of Tiffany & Company in honor of William Cullen Bryant, was cast in silver; see Walter Smith, The Masterpieces of the Centennial International Exhibition, vol. 2, Industrial Art (Philadelphia: Gebbie & Barrie, [1876-1878]), 275-77. And, apropos of the presence of Homer's Odyssey in Job Lot Cheap, it is interesting to note that "The Bryant Vase" included among its bas-relief designs a scene of William Cullen Bryant "as a child, looking up with veneration at a bust of Homer, to which his father points as a model"; see *ibid.*, 275.

<sup>80</sup>See the entry on Harnett in "An American Survey: Paintings from Two Centuries," Kennedy Quarterly 7, no. 1 (March 1967), 48.

<sup>81</sup>Numerous translations and adaptations of Shakespeare into various Indian languages before 1878 are noted in a special Shakespeare issue of the periodical Indian Literature 7, no. 1 (1964). See Navakanta Barua, "Shakespeare in Assamese," Indian Literature, *ibid.*, 15; S. K. Bhattacharyya, "Shakespeare in Bengali Theatre," *ibid.*, 36-39; M. V. Rajadhyaksha, "Shakespeare in Marathi," *ibid.*, 88, 90-93; and V. Raghavan, "Shakespeare in Sanskrit," *ibid.*, 114. Ranjee G. Shahani calculated that "there are in all fourteen vernacular languages in which [translations and adaptations of Shakespeare's] plays have appeared." Shahani counted 38 in Hindustani, 25 in Telegu, 24 in Marathi, 21 in Tamil, 20 in Hindi, 19 in Bengali, 10 in Gujarati, 9 in Kannada, 7 in Singhalese, 5 in Sindhi, 1 in Assamese, 1 in Oriya, 1 in Punjabi, and 1 in Sanskrit. Unfortunately, no specific titles or dates of publication were provided; see Shahani, Shakespeare Through Eastern Eyes (London: Herbert Joseph, 1932), 93-94.

<sup>82</sup>See A Shakespeare Bibliography: The Catalogue of the Birmingham Shakespeare Library. Part One: Accessions Pre-1932, vol. 3, Foreign Editions, Foreign Shakespeareana, . . . (London: Birmingham Public Library and Mansell, 1971), and Shakespeare Bibliography: Part Two: Accessions Post 1931, vol. 7 (London: Birmingham Public Library and Mansell, 1971).

It in no way diminishes my point, I believe, to notice that Shakespeare's Hamlet and Richard II were performed in 1607-08 by sailors on a British ship off Sierra Leone, which, of course, is on the west coast of Africa. See Roland Mushat Frye, Shakespeare's Life and Times (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), n.p., no. 66.

<sup>83</sup>Green, Shakespeare and the Emblem Writers, 352.

<sup>84</sup>Claghorn owned a copy of Poussin's Et in Arcadia Ego--probably of the later version in the Louvre in Paris, rather than the earlier version in the Devonshire Collection in Chatsworth--that was executed by the Frenchman Maurice Blot (1753-1818). Another copy of Poussin's famous painting was in the collection of George McLaughlin, and was attributed to an unknown artist, possibly French, named "J. Mathieu"; see National Museum of American Art's Index to American Art Exhibition Catalogues, vol. 1, 338, no. 7739, and vol. 4, 2328, no. 59508.

<sup>85</sup>See Franklin Kelly, "A Passion for Landscape: The Paintings of Frederic Edwin Church" in Frederic Edwin Church, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1989-90), 38.

Not surprisingly, in his excellent article "'The Ravages of the Axe': The Meaning of the Tree Stump in Nineteenth-Century American Art," Nicolai Cikovsky Jr. described this leitmotif as "a nearly self-evident symbol of mortality," see Cikovsky, Art Bulletin 61, no. 4 (December 1979), 626. See also Cikovsky, "George Inness's The Lackawanna Valley: 'Type of the Modern'" in The Railroad in American Art: Representations of Technological Change, ed. Susan Daly and Leo Marx (Massachusetts Institute of Technology: MIT Press, 1988), 86.

<sup>86</sup>Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass (Brooklyn: n.p., 1855), 16-17.

<sup>87</sup>Elizabeth Stoddard, "Unreturning" in Poems (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co.; Cambridge, Mass.: Riverside Press, 1895), 128.

<sup>88</sup>Isaiah 40:6-8.

<sup>89</sup>[Clarence Cook], "Academy of Design; Fifty-Fourth Annual Exhibition; Fourth Article," New-York Daily Tribune 26 April 1879, 5.

<sup>90</sup>Quoted in E. R. Billings, Tobacco: Its History, Varieties, Culture, Manufacturer and Commerce, with an account of its various modes of use, from its

first discovery until now (Hartford, Conn.: American Publishing Co., 1875), 100.

This poem, sometimes attributed to George Wither, appeared in Thomas Jenner's The Soules Solace, or Thirtie and one Spirituall Emblems, 1626, no. 31, under the title "Tobacco." In the nineteenth century, in addition to Billings, versions and variations of the poem can be found in Daniel Wilson, Pipes and Tobacco: An Ethnographic Sketch (Toronto: Lovell and Gibson, 1857), 50-51; F[rederick] W. Fairholt, Tobacco: Its History and Associations (London: Chapman and Hall, 1859), 101-03; A Veteran of Smokedom [Andrew Steinmetz], The Smoker's Guide, Philosopher and Friend. What to Smoke--What to Smoke With--and the whole "what's what" of Tobacco, Historical, Botanical, Manufactural, Anecdotal, Social, Medical, &c (London: Hardwicke & Bogue, 1877), 82-83, 102-04; Tobacco Talk and Smoker's Gossip. An Amusing Miscellany of Fact and Anecdote relating to the "Great Plant" in all its Forms and Uses including a Selection from Nicotian Literature (London: George Redway, 1884), 98-99; and Joseph Knight, comp., Pipe and Pouch: The Smoker's Own Book of Poetry (Boston: Joseph Knight Co., 1895), 86-87, 148-50.

<sup>91</sup>Robert Eden Brown, "The Poet's Corner; My Havana Cigar," The Play-Bill 2, no. 1 (August 1, 1876), n.p.

The relationship between smoking and transience is echoed (though olfaction is nowhere suggested) in Merry Rhymes and Stories, for Merry Little Learners (London: Ward, Lock, and Tyler, n.d.), a mid nineteenth-century collection of verses designed to forestall the physical and moral corruption of a youthful audience. In a self-consciously didactic poem entitled "The Foolish Man of Goole," written as a corrective to the somewhat roseate view of smoking described by Brown among many others, the transitory role of tobacco is played on a rather different level: "There was a young fellow of Goole, / Was suspected of being a fool, / For he lounged all the day, / And his time smoked away, / This foolish young party of Goole" (10-11). With regard to such limericks, it is interesting to note that Edward Lear, whose far more skillful nonsense poems popularized this form of verse, felt compelled to correct "absurd reports" that his "Rhymes and Pictures . . . have a symbolical meaning." See Edward Lear, intro. Edward Lear's Book of Nonsense and More Nonsense (Ware, Hertfordshire, England: Wordsworth Editions, 1987), n.p. As Lear's words indicate, even the most harmless of verses, much to his chagrin, could be taken as symbolically revealing.

<sup>92</sup>Francis Quarles, Quarles' Emblems (London: James Nisbet and Co., 1861), 81-82.

<sup>93</sup>United States Centennial Commission. International Exhibition, 1876, vol. 3. Department of Art, 22, no. 370b. The painting was included in the United States art exhibit, but following the Centennial was mounted in the Women's Pavilion, see Robin Bolton-Smith and William H. Truettner, Lilly Martin Spencer: The Joys of Sentiment, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: Published for the National Collection of

Fine Arts by the Smithsonian Institution Press, 1973), 212.

<sup>94</sup>James W. Tottis, catalogue entry on The Social Club in American Paintings from the Manoojian Collection, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art; Detroit Institute of Arts, 1989), 104.

<sup>95</sup>Billings seems to confirm the existence of such a brand of cigars: "It is a common thing here [in the United States] to see a man ask in a cigar store for a Flor del Fumar, a Figaro, or an Española . . . these are not the names which designate the size, but are the names of the manufactories. In Havana, were a man to ask for a Flor del Fumar, the dealer would ask him what size he wanted"; see Billings, Tobacco, 262. However, if Harnett used as his model an actual cigar box rather than inventing one, he nevertheless chose to include a box with this particular--and suggestive--brand name from a pool of tens of thousands of different cigar brands then on the American market. This conservative estimate of the number of brands available is based on a conversation with Tony Hyman, author of Handbook of American Cigar Boxes (Elmira, N. Y.: Arnot Art Museum, 1979).

<sup>96</sup>Billings, Tobacco, 261.

<sup>97</sup>Psalms 102:3-4.

<sup>98</sup>I am most grateful to Margaret Phelan, Office of the Curator, Department of the Treasury, Washington, D.C., and to Leonard Buckley, Assistant Foreman, Product Design and Engraving Division, Bureau of Engraving and Printing, Department of the Treasury, Washington, D.C., for their generous and kind help. In a memorandum forwarded to the author, Mr. Buckley identified the stamp in The Social Club as "a 50 cigar, 25 cent, tax paid stamp of the First Series, under the Act of July 20, 1868 as amended."

<sup>99</sup>Abraham Wivell, in An Historical Account of the Monumental Bust of Shakespeare in the Chancel of the Church, at Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire (London: Published by the Author, 1827), 8, included an engraved frontispiece of the monument and described it with these words: ". . . on each side [of Shakespeare's coat of arms] is a small figure in a sitting posture, one holding in his left hand a spade, and the other, whose eyes are closed, with an inverted torch in his left hand, the right resting upon a scull [sic], as symbols of mortality." Wivell's description was quoted by James Orchard Halliwell in The Life of William Shakespeare (London: John Russell Smith, 1848), 288, which includes an engraving of the monument on the opposite page. See also Nathan Drake, Shakespeare and his Times (Paris: Baudrey's European Library, 1843), 633: "Shakespeare and Stratford-upon-Avon; The Tomb of Shakespeare," Illustrated London News 11, no. 281 (September 18, 1847), 188; James Walter, Shakespeare's Home and Rural Life (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1874), 17 (illus., opp. 17); and J[oseph] Parker Norris, Portraits

of Shakespeare (Philadelphia: Robert M. Lindsay, 1885), 24 (illus., 26).

A parallel use of the inverted torch is found on the tomb of Thomas Bentley, friend and partner of Josiah Wedgwood, which was described by Llewellynn Jewitt in The Wedgwoods: being a Life of Josiah Wedgwood (London: Virtue Brothers and Co., 1865), 266. F. Warre Cornish, in A Concise Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1898), 304, notes that the torch is carried "in an inverted position, by Sleep and Death."

<sup>100</sup>Hyman, Handbook of Cigar Boxes, 4.

<sup>101</sup>Memorandum Relative to the unnecessary Expenditures imposed by the Treasury Regulations on Manufacturers and Dealers in Cigars [c. 1879], 3.

<sup>102</sup>The cancellation of tax stamps was performed in ink, by hand, until 1875, when the procedure was generally superceded by rubber stamp cancellations; see Hyman, Handbook of Cigar Boxes, 72-73.

<sup>103</sup>Daniel Wilson, Pipes and Tobacco: An Ethnographic Survey (Toronto: Lovell and Gibson, 1857), 1.

<sup>104</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>105</sup>[Andrew Steinmetz], The Smoker's Guide, Philosopher and Friend (London: Hardwicke & Bogue, 1877), 69.

<sup>106</sup>Daniel G. Brinton, Races and Peoples: Lectures on the Science of Ethnography (New York: N. D. C. Hodges, Publisher, 1890), 29.

<sup>107</sup>*Ibid.*

It may fairly be objected that in The Social Club Harnett presents us with a host of pipes that are mottled and graduated in color. However, Brinton, for one, provided "a practical scale" upon which one apprehended the richness of skin pigmentation. He divided this index of color diversity into three niches: "dark," "medium," and "white." On the way he subdivided each niche into zones of intersecting color. Thus, Brinton saw "dark" as consisting of "black," "dark brown, reddish undertone," and "dark brown, yellowish undertone"; "medium" as "reddish" and "yellowish (olive)"; and "white" as "white, brown undertone (grayish)," white "yellow undertone," and white "rosy undertone"; see Races and Peoples, 31. By the same token, the modulating colors of Harnett's pipes not only gives them the effect of age, but it gives them the germ of this sort of theory of racial diversity.

<sup>108</sup>Joel Shew, Tobacco: Its History, Nature, and Effects on the Body and Mind (New York: Fowlers and Wells, Publishers, 1849), 19-20.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., 20.

<sup>110</sup>Alfred Crowquill [pseud. Alfred Henry Forrester], ed., The Laughing Philosopher (in the Middle of the Nineteenth Century) (Philadelphia: Gebbie & Co., Publishers, 1889) was surely written in the mid-nineteenth century, as its title suggests, for its author Alfred Henry Forrester died in 1872.

<sup>111</sup>Crowquill, ed., Laughing Philosopher, 240. The illustration Pipes appears on page 241.

<sup>112</sup>This strain is particularly evident in the comments of a traveler in Peru quoted by Billings in Tobacco: Its History, Varieties, Culture, Manufacture and Commerce, 144: "'Scarcely in any regions of the world is smoking so common as in Peru. The rich as well as the poor, the old man as well as the boy, the master as well as the servant, the lady as well as the negroes who wait on her, the young maiden as well as the mother--all smoke and never cease smoking, except when eating, or sleeping, or in church. Social distinctions are as numerous and as marked in Peru as anywhere else, and there is the most exclusive pride of color and blood. But differences of color and of rank are wholly disregarded when a light for a cigar is requested, a favor which it is not considered a liberty to ask, and which it would be deemed a gross act of incivility to refuse'." A bit further on, Billings expanded upon this idea when he declared that "you have a right to accost any one smoking in the street [in Cuba], however much may be his superiority or inferiority to yourself, and to ask a light for your cigar; even negroes hatless and shirtless, thus address well-dickied gentlemen, and vice versa"; see ibid., 274.

Certainly this mode of thought was not peculiar to Billings. For example, in Laughing Philosopher, Alfred Crowquill [Alfred Henry Forrester] writes: "In Spain the love of the Indian weed is so 'levelling,' that the lowliest tatterdemalion approaches a grandee of the first rank, and presenting his cigar, asks him for a light. for the man who smokes is considered equal to any man who smokes, and the proud Hidalgo, still preserving all his dignity, promptly proffers the glowing tip of his best Havannah. How gracious is this sympathy in the high and mighty, which illuminates the low and humble, without losing a tittle of their dignity"; see ibid., 238-39. See also [Steinmetz], Smoker's Guide, 102-03.

<sup>113</sup>Frederick W. Fairholt, Tobacco: Its History and Associations, 331-332.

<sup>114</sup>Charles Sprague, The Poetical and Prose Writings of Charles Sprague (New York: C. S. Francis & Co., 1850), 75-76. Sprague's poem "To My Cigar" appeared in Billings, Tobacco, 281, as well as in Joseph Knight, comp., Pipe and Pouch, 63.

<sup>115</sup>[Steinmetz], ibid., 57.

<sup>116</sup>[Cook], ibid.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER 4

## "A WONDER AND A PUZZLE":

## WILLIAM M. HARNETT'S LATE WORKS IN AN ALLEGORICAL CONTEXT

Whatever the theory or dictum lying behind the objections to The Social Club (Fig. 3) in the aforementioned New-York Daily Tribune review of 26 April 1879, presumably written by Clarence Cook, the severity of the criticism must have been painful to Harnett. Unfortunately for him, the same critical note was struck again when he contributed a Still Life to the Third Autumn Exhibition of the National Academy of Design in 1884. In November of that year a review appeared in Studio, probably by the ubiquitous Cook, that not only repeated the same objections but exhibited the same condescending attitude and biliousness which had characterized his earlier article in the Daily Tribune. After acknowledging the public's taste for "wonderful pieces of finish"--a phrase put mockingly in quotations--Cook proceeded quickly to his thesis:

. . . in Mr. Harnett's picture [Still Life], and in Mr. [Henry] Alexander's [The Lost Genius; University Art Museum, Berkeley], it is plain that there has been close study of the things represented, and a desire to paint them as they really look. The fault in the two pictures is a want of artistic subordination of the unimportant to the important, and there is, in both, a deficient sense of beauty; each of these artists chooses ugly or uninteresting things to paint, and has not the art to reconcile us to their ugliness.

Of Harnett's and Alexander's chances for redemption, Cook declared that,

with all the shortcomings of execution, and want of taste, that make these pictures so unsatisfactory, so disagreeable, we have no doubt that a month in Holland, or in Paris, with the old Dutch painters of such scenes, would do wonders for both Mr. Alexander and Mr. Harnett.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, it would not have required much effort on Cook's part to imagine that Harnett, who had taken up residence in Munich several years earlier, might, almost inevitably, have seen in Germany works by the seventeenth-century Dutch still-life painters that the critic so generously commended to him in his 1884 review.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, from the richness of Harnett's European experience came a number of still lifes that clearly reflect upon "the old Dutch painters." His series of still lifes with lobsters, for instance, was probably based on the example of Abraham van Beyeren,<sup>3</sup> a seventeenth-century Dutch painter who was famous for crustacean and fish still lifes and whose Large Still Life with Lobster of 1653 Harnett might have come upon in Munich at the Alte Pinakothek.<sup>4</sup> But van Beyeren had plenty of company. The lobster motif is to be encountered frequently in seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish still-life painting, surfacing in the work of artists such as Jan Davidsz. de Heem, Frans Snyders (1579-1657), Isaac van Duynen (1628-c. 80), Artus Claessens (act. 1625-44), Alexander Coosemans (1627-89), Jan van den Hecke I (1620-84), and Andries Benedetti (act. 1641-49), among others.

Once abroad, Harnett also began to explore still life on a miniaturistic scale, which seems to reflect the influence of contemporary European painters such as Camilla Friedlander (1856-1912).<sup>5</sup> His venture into the miniaturistic format implies, in the words of William H. Gerdtz, that "however much Harnett aimed at equaling or surpassing the illusionism of the Old Masters, he did not want his work to be seen

only as illusionistic, so he deliberately rejected the most obvious qualification for deceptive realism, the scale of reality."<sup>6</sup> Cook was silent with regard to Harnett's paintings in a miniaturistic format. In the 1884 review in Studio, Cook neglected to mention that while "a desire to paint ['the things represented'] as they really look" would seem to inform Harnett's large exhibition pieces, it is not in fact the corollary of his miniaturistic still lifes. We may suppose Cook overlooked these works because they were not currently on display or were unknown to the critic, or, perhaps, they were simply beneath his notice. It is worth adding, however, that when Harnett sent a miniaturistic still life to the First Autumn Exhibition of the National Academy of Design in 1882, the critic for the New-York Daily Tribune that year wrote, from an ideological viewpoint reminiscent of Cook's, that

Mr. Harnett has applied his imitative skill hitherto exercised on too large a scale, to the production of a miniature piece well worth looking at as a curiosity. Nor is it without merit as a picture, but in artistic treatment shows a decided advance on the artist's part.<sup>7</sup>

One cannot read these comments without noticing that the critic's attitude toward Harnett's picture reflects Cookian criteria in which realistic style not only spoils a painting, but has the effect of stifling any further temptation to consider the work from the point of view of the imagination. Yet, despite these critics's assertions, the symbolic impulse that appears to be engaged in Harnett's work of the late 1870s is no less clearly reflected in the unconflicted surfaces of his paintings of the 1880s, including some of those executed in Europe, as shall appear.

Available biographical data about Harnett's move to Europe is sketchy but a postcard he sent to Edward Taylor Snow, dated October 30, documents his arrival

in London in autumn of 1880.<sup>8</sup> If Harnett's remarks in the New York News interview could be taken as a reliable guide, a chronology might be suggested in which, around the beginning of 1881, after "several months" in London, he departed for Frankfurt; and "six months" later, in the summer of 1881, he proceeded to Munich, where he remained for "the next four years."<sup>9</sup> Harnett moved to Paris in 1885, spending "three months painting one picture"--his final, and arguably his greatest, version of After the Hunt (Fig. 6)--which was exhibited in Paris Salon in the spring of that year. Although Harnett recalled that, "After the exhibition I remained six months in Paris, . . . and consequently I gathered together my belongings and came back to New York,"<sup>10</sup> he may have spent the latter part of the year in London.<sup>11</sup> In fairness it should be added that an anonymous columnist in the American Art Journal asserted on 23 January 1886 that the artist was "now living in Paris."<sup>12</sup> It seems possible, however, that Harnett returned to New York before the end of 1885, since by December of that year After the Hunt had already been installed and begun to attract notice in Theodore Stewart's saloon on Warren Street.<sup>13</sup> And yet, as noted in Chapter 3, in using Harnett's New York News interview, it is difficult to determine where accurate facts leave off and misstatements begin.

Apart from whether or not we have correctly deduced the chronology of Harnett's travels abroad, it seems perfectly reasonable that his undertaking was prompted, as he put it, by "the one cherished dream of my life. . . . [to] go on to Europe and pursue my studies in the home of art."<sup>14</sup> It is beyond doubt, in any case, that by the fall of 1881 Harnett was settled in Munich and that he had applied for

admission to the Munich Academy. Harnett's application was rejected,<sup>15</sup> but he was industrious and determined. After finding the door to the Munich Academy closed to him, Harnett turned to the Kunstverein in Munich, an organization of artists and art patrons which sponsored weekly exhibitions. He was listed as a member of the Munich Kunstverein from 1881 to 1884, and showed at least a few works under their auspices.<sup>16</sup> While he was denied the professional sanction of the Munich Academy, there were commentators in that city who, on the basis of Harnett paintings exhibited elsewhere, recognized some of the artistic merits of his work. For example, in discussing the prestigious Internationale Kunstausstellung, convened at the Glaspalast in Munich in the summer of 1883, an American artist studying in Munich wrote, "Harnett, a Philadelphian who couldn't get into the school two years ago has a large still life which the Germans think a master piece; it is very fine, wonderfully deceptive, and reminds one of the old German masters."<sup>17</sup> Of a Kunstverein exhibition in August of 1882, a critic likewise asserted that

The exhibition at present is in the usual midsummer doldrums; thanks to this situation, a "Still Life" takes first place this week. A fairly large picture by W. Harnett, "Table with Books, Sheet Music, Musical Instruments," must be called a masterpiece of its type. It is scarcely possible to paint these objects with greater truth to nature and in a more pleasing manner. The partly yellowed music-sheets and the cracked flute worked in precious ivory provide more food for thought than any of your wooden, badly executed human figures.<sup>18</sup>

The reviewer's description of the work can be applied, with some confidence, to Harnett's A Study Table (Fig. 17), which was painted during his residence in Munich in 1882. One cannot help noticing that, as was the case with The Social Club in the American press, when Harnett attracted comment it was chiefly for those aspects of

his work most easily assimilated to phrases such as "truth to nature" and "wonderfully deceptive." Of course, we have observed that such terms were canonical in the language of Harnett's supporters. And these phrases may remind us of the passage in Cook's review of the National Academy of Design exhibition in 1879, in which we read that Harnett was "working in deceptive imitation of Nature," except the phrase in Cook's usage had a derogatory meaning. But the chief point is that while the literal-minded criticism of A Study Table may share that rigid, though perhaps unconscious, refusal to discuss iconographic content, it can be argued that the work is, nevertheless, inhabited by a recognizable symbolic program, which provides a rich source of "food for thought."

In A Study Table Harnett's interest in the theme of vanitas, sharpened by his exposure to a wealth of European art, may once again be at work. But here it seems to consort with a change of attitude on the part of the artist. There is evidence in the picture that Harnett is not given over entirely to the unpromising end of life, but rather he seems purposively engaged in raising the prospects of resurrection—an outlook that would continue to inhabit his productions, and which appears often in Dutch vanitas still lifes such as Munich offered in abundance.<sup>19</sup> Like so many of Harnett's vanitas paintings, A Study Table is seasoned with the revelations of vanity that can be apprehended through the senses. Here, the musical instruments and sheet music, the ivory tobacco box, and the tankard may allude to the pleasures of the senses. The worn books and the iron helmet also deserve comment, for these objects, in keeping with a long-established iconographic tradition, can be seen as reflections of

the vanity of learning on the one hand, and of wealth and power on the other.

Although these symbolic allusions are presented in recondite form, they are much enhanced by the artist's illusionistic style. The wonderfully tactile old books, the cracked flute, and the dented tankard, which bear witness to the effects of time and hard use, are rendered with an irrepressible realism that appeals directly to the viewer. Indeed, Harnett quite deliberately presented an image in which the torn cover of Don Quixote/Tome IV and the sheet music for La Dame blanche project engagingly toward the viewer.

But Harnett not only captured the fabric of Dutch seventeenth-century vanitas still lifes, he may have endeavored to extend the traditional iconographic scheme. Just as he may have given fresh life to the theme of vanitas in the late 1870s, while sparing the viewer the weight of the death's head, Harnett may again have explored this subject in A Study Table without the conspicuous assistance of a human skull. We can find a comparable device in the medieval helmet, however, explored in a host of other works of his Munich period, which has vacant eye holes and a grim metallic visage that make up, in effect, a death's head. Indeed, as an expression of vanity, the helmet--the property of a once-proud knight--now sits in an empty posture of nobility near the crown of the composition, and is relegated to a shadowy region on the far side of the heap. We are reminded that neither wealth nor power offers any protection from death. That fact of the human condition is consistent throughout the natural kingdom, and it is a point which may be underscored by the dimly seen vase of daisies in the background at the left. Tellingly, the flowers

are in bud rather than fully developed, emphasizing the impression of time and seasonal change, and hinting at the latent possibility of redemption. As Frederick Edward Hulme observed in Bards and Blossoms in 1877:

The renewal of the face of nature in spring-time, after the weary months of winter, has not inaptly made this season a type of the eternal verities, the bursting forth of the blossoms of the earth from their wintry tomb being a similitude of that resurrection when the earth shall yield up her dead, when the sea shall reveal her secrets, and the countless tribes of earth shall issue from their parent dust to stand in the presence of their God.<sup>20</sup>

And, indeed, this nineteenth-century theological attitude could involve not only flowers but the vast plenitude of nature. Consider, for example, some words from Edward Hitchcock's Religious Lectures on Peculiar Phenomena in the Four Seasons, published in 1850.

Had we no experience of the effects of spring, we could not imagine, during the winter months of such a climate as ours, that leaves, and flowers, and fruit, would ever clothe the barren trees, or a green carpet again cover the earth, or the air, the earth and the waters swarm with animal life. And when we should witness the ten thousand forms of vegetable and animal existence, which the genial influences of spring develope, it would seem almost as if a new creation had taken place.<sup>21</sup>

At last, completing the cycle of growth and decay in nature, as it appears in Harnett's picture, is the small, light-brown figure of a beetle, just visible along the mouthpiece of the flute at the left foreground. The ominous beetle, which had long carried dark overtones of winter, would be perfectly in keeping with the climate of vanitas in A Study Table. To be sure, the beetle's associations with the winter season and decay was commonplace during Harnett's time. For example, according to M. S. Lantz's Acme Cyclopedia and Dictionary, published in 1884, "Beetles feed on decaying substances, either animal or vegetable, and are often called the 'scavengers of nature

. . . .’ Beetles live but one season and die before winter, leaving nothing but their eggs to continue their species.”<sup>22</sup> Likewise, the popular nineteenth-century Danish writer Hans Christian Andersen had such background in mind in his tale “The Beetle,” in which his tiny protagonist wakes in a greenhouse and, taking stock of its surroundings, remarks upon the “incomparable plenty of plants” and “How good they will taste when they are decayed.” And indeed, Emily Dickinson must have been impelled by the same idea when she wrote these lines from the point of view of a dead body in a grave: “When I, am long ago, / an Island in dishonored grass--/ whom none but Beetles--know.”<sup>23</sup>

Harnett also could be using carefully selected titles to amplify further the meaning of the picture. In this aspect A Study Table would resemble Harnett’s modus operandi in many other works. Here, Harnett presents the sheet music from François-Adrien Boïeldieu’s La Dame blanche and Cervantes’s Don Quixote/Tome IV as a counterbalance to the main pyramidal group, spilling over the edge of the table. In addition, there is a volume titled Dante Alighieri half-buried at the core of the pile, and near the apex of the aggregation a large book inscribed “BIBLIA SACRA.” In this case the titles appropriated by Harnett also bespeak the hope of resurrection. The title of Boïeldieu’s opera refers to a woman whose ghost, it is believed, lives on in the castle of Avenel. It also happens that the idea of life after death, with respect to Christian notions of salvation, is expressed in the opening paragraph of Book IV of Don Quixote (Second Part), which begins with these words:

It is in vain to expect uniformity in the affairs of this life; the whole seems rather to be in a course of perpetual change. The seasons from year to year run

in their appointed circle--spring is succeeded by summer, summer by autumn, and autumn by winter, which is again followed by the season of renovation; and thus they perform their everlasting round. But man's mortal career has no such renewal: from infancy to age it hastens onward to its end, and to the beginning of that state which has neither change nor termination.<sup>24</sup>

It is impossible to think of Dante Alighieri without recalling his Commedia, and the poet's allegorical journey through Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, and it seems possible that Harnett included the title Dante Alighieri because he had this mediating vision in mind. And while Dante reached Paradise in his poem, and gained worldly immortality in the bargain, we are perhaps intended to recognize that, in the cosmic scheme of things (as Harnett had conceived it in Bard of Avon), his good fortune will be short-lived. One may further surmise that the copy of Biblia Sacra several steps above Dante Alighieri was meant to convey the proper route to immortality. Appropriately, in Christian formulation, daisies allude to the innocence of the Christ child,<sup>25</sup> and in Harnett's painting the daisies are on the verge of blooming. We might suppose that they anticipate the childhood of Christ, in the sense of looking forward to it as the season of innocence and as the first step on the path to Christian salvation. A similar view is expressed in Longfellow's "The Reaper and the Flowers," which begins with the famous words "There is a Reaper, whose name is Death." In the third stanza, the poem tells us that "He gazed at the flowers with tearful eyes, / He kissed their drooping leaves; / It was for the Lord of Paradise / He bound them in his sheaves." The next two stanzas are spoken by Death, followed by comments in the poem's voice:

"My Lord has need of these flowerets gay,"  
The Reaper said, and smiled;

"Dear tokens of the earth are they,  
Where he was once a child.

"They shall all bloom in fields of light,  
Transplanted by my care,  
And saints, upon their garments white,  
These sacred blossoms wear."

And the mother gave, in tears and pain,  
The flowers she most did love;  
She knew she should find them again  
In the fields of light above.<sup>26</sup>

(It is worth noting that Harnett makes reference to Longfellow's poems in his paintings Philadelphia Public Ledger, March 2, 1880 of 1880 [Westmoreland Museum of Art, Greensburg, Penn.] and Emblems of Peace of 1891 [Museum of Fine Arts, Springfield, Mass.] )

It was early in Harnett's years in Munich, prior to his execution of A Study Table in 1882 (the year, incidentally, in which Longfellow passed away), that medieval armor began to appear in his still-life paintings. A helmet and sword came to light first, according to the Birch catalogue, in the now-lost painting Reminiscences of Olden Time, and surfaced again in the suitably named (but unlocated) Ye Knights of Old.<sup>27</sup> Even though the general outlines of these two works are known from old photographs, it would be tempting, but foolhardy, to speculate on the symbolic nature of the compositions. It is safe to say, however, that in the 1880s we can recognize Harnett's growing interest in still-life arrangements which combined armor with flowers. Such is the case in A Study Table, as we have just seen, and other examples soon followed.<sup>28</sup> There is even a slightly later instance, executed after his return to America, in which Harnett translated the motifs of a helmet and flowers into the

decorative border of a table cover: his 1887 painting Ease (Fig. 37). But while the helmet in Ease is superficially masked by the richly patterned border, a number of "real" flowers crop up: a small bunch of marguerites and some coneflowers in a metal ewer, and a pink rose and bud in a glass vase. Only the table cover design of foliage and helmet, it would seem, went unnoticed when the painting was described in the pages of the Springfield Daily Republican of 7 November 1887:

James T. Abbe of this city, president of the Holyoke envelope company, has just placed in his office at Holyoke one of the finest oil paintings of still life ever done in America. The painter is William T. [sic] Harnett, a young Irish-American who has never studied under any master, but has had studios in Munich and Paris, and acquired an extraordinary skill in this especial line. A picture by him entitled "After the Hunt" received great praise for its technical excellence on its exhibition in the Paris Salon, last year, and is now owned in New York, in one of those luxurious barrooms that make a special feature of art. Mr. Abbe gave Mr. Harnett an order last winter for the picture which is now in his possession, and the artist spent seven months upon it. As may be inferred, it is a large canvass, the objects being represented in their actual size. It is entitled "Ease," and the subject is a library table, upon which books, papers, musical instruments and other things that might well be met with in a library are disposed in careless confusion. The table cover, a felt cloth of peacock blue with a rich figured border in several shades of brown, is painted so that the eye feels its texture, and every article upon it is done with an amazing fidelity of imitation. The spectator's immediate impulse is to step forward and remove the lighted cigar which has just been laid down upon a newspaper, and which has already burned a circle in the paper. The fire is not more perfect in counterfeit, however, than the ash over it and the grain of the wrapper of the excellent cigar; and it fairly seems as if one smelt the fragrance of the smoke that rises,—a little hurt, perhaps, by the mingling of the paper odor. At the left an ancient leather-bound Bible rests, and upon it a smaller book with lighter colored leather binding; slanting over these a volume bound in green with gilt title, and a half-calf gilt tops the pile. Behind these a student lamp stands, but this is purposely obscure. A tall yellow-bronze handled vase rises in the midst of the rest, containing a handful of marguerites and a few coneflowers. Another pile of books is seen on the right of the urn in front, and a few more further back and to the right. On the first of these stands a clear glass flower vase with a single pink rose and bud in it. This is the first rose Mr. Harnett ever painted, and it looks as though he had painted nothing but roses. A violin leans against and behind the further pile of books, while before it rests a palm-leaf fan. A

copper-hued bronze vase of the simplest pattern stands in front of the fan, and a pair of scissors is placed in it. Across the front of the table rests a flute, whose bone and wood are wonderfully copied. Beneath the newspaper a sheet of time-stained music hangs over the edge of the table. It is unnecessary to particularize further than we have already done; it is enough to say that in every detail of the great variety of textures thus presented to the artist for his skill to reproduce, he has been sufficient to the task; while at the same time he has imparted to the canvas a deep and rich harmony of tone which will improve with time, and even increase the interest of the painting; and Mr. Abbe is therefore to be congratulated on possessing in "ease" a truly valuable work in its line of art. There is an additional interest for him in the fact that nearly every article represented is a personal or family property, and some of the few objects that are not have a special interest of their own. For instance, the light-brown leather book mentioned is the old account book of Thomas Noble, once governor of Indiana (and the grandfather of Mr. Tyner, Mr. Abbe's partner), and contains the record of "Black Tom's and Sarah's children"--Black Tom having been a slave of Mr Noble in Kentucky and one of the originals of Mrs. Stowe's "Uncle Tom." Mrs. Stowe made Black Tom's acquaintance when visiting her brother Henry Ward Beecher when he was pastor in Indianapolis, the home of Gov. Noble. The picture thus described has been placed, handsomely framed in a dark and unobtrusive, though rich, carved frame, set in red plush and curtained with maroon plush, in a room opening from Mr. Abbe's private office in the Holyoke envelope company's factory, and is shown by gas-light.<sup>29</sup>

As regards James T. Abbe, the president of the Holyoke Envelope Company, it is easy to imagine him in his headquarters on Cabot Street taking a moment from the rigors of work and looking, with wistful relief, at his acquisition.<sup>30</sup> The reporter described the subject as "a library table," and the tabletop is piled with a host of objects--flowers, books, musical instruments, and sheet music--that might, through leisurely study, provide respite from the world of business. Like a number of other Harnett paintings--think for example of Mortality and Immortality and Music and Literature--Ease projects the idea of an unseen person who moments before was involved in some sort of solitary activity or pleasure. (In this instance, the role of the fanned pages of a book at the forward edge of the table is taken over by a lit cigar

and, although it can no longer be seen today, the "smoke that rises" from it.<sup>31</sup>) Having noted the reporter's claim that "nearly every object is a personal or family property" of Abbe's, we are invited to consider the possibility that it exhibits to us a glimpse into the private world of the patron. It may be that the various objects represented for Abbe a condition of solitary leisure of which we, in turn, are permitted to share.

It is also possible that the various elements of the picture not only refer to the personal and material comforts of Abbe himself, but carry a significant burden of meaning in their own right. In this connection we may recall that from the beginning the picture was entitled Ease--a term denoting "freedom from pain, worry, or trouble" as well as "freedom from constraint." It may not be by accident that the work was identified by the word "ease," for there seems to be in the painting a generous use of allusions--some explicit and some buried--to both levels of meaning. But the iconography of the picture likewise points to a more free-ranging consideration of the idea of "ease," for unfolding just beneath the surface of Ease appear to be tensions that have a sharp social, historical, and political edge.<sup>32</sup>

The centerpiece, the very keystone, of this ambitious, large painting (the biggest recorded tabletop still life of the artist's career) is the "yellow-bronze handled vase"--possibly a mid-nineteenth century English ewer--with marguerites and coneflowers. We may care to remember in this regard that the canvas was cut down on all sides after it had sustained damage--probably in the fire that devastated San Francisco after the 1906 earthquake, when the painting was in the possession of the

San Francisco Art Association--with the greatest violence inflicted on the left-hand margin of the picture.<sup>33</sup> And thus, while the metal ewer and daisies still form the central vertical axis and apex of Harnett's pyramidal composition, their placement originally may have been less static and somewhat more subtle than it appears today. Far from subtle, however, are other aspects of repoussé wine jug.

Doubtless the reporter for the Springfield Daily Republican did not care to press the point, but the side of the ewer facing the viewer is decorated with an unabashedly sexual scene: It represents a maenad, with a lyre at her feet, along with an ithyphallic satyr who holds a tympanum in his right hand and a thyrsus--that is, a staff festooned with a pine cone and vine leaves--in his left (Fig. 38).<sup>34</sup> The thyrsus was an instrument associated with Dionysian or Bacchic rites, and thus the maenad and the satyr, whose enthusiasm is made the more conspicuous because he is tinctured with metallic rigidity and a gleaming protuberance, are quite obviously inhabitants of an ancient domain of sexuality and excess. To be sure, a Greek oinochoe, or wine jug, stands to the left of the satyr where it serves as a mute witness to the state of frenzy instilled by "wine and other exciting causes."<sup>35</sup> It is worth mentioning that the general shape of the ewer is not only adapted from that of a Greek oinochoe but is also embellished with satyr heads, seen in profile, on either side of its neck.<sup>36</sup> Although lying near the heart of the painting, it would hardly come as a surprise to learn that the maenad and frankly aroused satyr did not recommend themselves for discussion in Abbe's hometown newspaper. And so, whether or not the ewer is an object of his "personal or family property," we might wonder why the scene on its

side is afforded such prominence, especially in a picture exhibited outside Abbe's office rather, say, than inside his home. One wonders why Harnett would leave uncensored the image of Dionysian revelry, presenting in explicit and direct terms what we may suppose would have shocked, or at least embarrassed, a late nineteenth-century American audience.

There is a possible explanation. At first blush the satyr is merely a figure of license, his unbridled passion an affirmation of animality. While a comparison with the "purity" of Hiram Powers's (1805-73) Greek Slave (1851 [fourth replica]; Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven) would be a questionable one in some respects, the unfettered sexuality of the satyr might be interpreted, like the nudity of the Greek Slave, as nothing short of morally acceptable and justifiable. Though he lacks the "spiritual innocence," as Gerdtz described it, of Powers's figure,<sup>37</sup> the satyr nevertheless makes obvious as well as obscure claims upon the multivalent idea of release as a property of ease. The excited satyr is inescapably related to a Dionysian fervor, expressed by means of the thyrsus and oinochoe, and as such jubilantly declares his allegiance to Greek rites like the rural Dionysia and the Anthesteria.<sup>38</sup> Appropriately enough, it was decreed in both the rural Dionysia and the Anthesteria (and, incidentally, the Roman Saturnalia) that slaves should enjoy a taste--albeit short-lived--of manumission. If Harnett's Ease could be viewed from this perspective, the Dionysian scene might acquire a certain ethical purposefulness. Admittedly, however, so arcane a knowledge of Dionysian rites would not seem to be a matter of general amusement in America in the nineteenth century, and it may seem improbable

that either Abbe or Harnett would have been acquainted with them. Yet, detailed accounts of festivals like the rural Dionysia and the Anthesteria is precisely what we find in nineteenth-century antiquarian studies.

William Smith, for example, in A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities, published in 1842, observed that the rural Dionysia "was held with the highest degree of merriment and freedom; even slaves enjoyed full freedom during its celebration." He noted as well that "Slaves were permitted to take part in the general rejoicings of the Anthesteria."<sup>39</sup> These observations became familiar through the work of Smith, and also through numerous retellings of ancient lore, dating to the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, how much Harnett's ewer filled with daisies could be enriched with meaning we may imagine by considering Charles Anthon's account of the third and final day of the Anthesteria in A Manual of Grecian Antiquities, published in 1852, a decade after Smith's Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities first appeared. According to Anthon, on this day--called the choetroe ("the pot-feast")<sup>41</sup>--"persons offered pots with flowers [*italics mine*], seeds, or cooked vegetables as a sacrifice to Bacchus and Hermes Chthonius."<sup>42</sup> Though not every nineteenth-century account refers specifically to the offerings of "pots with flowers," this aspect of the festival was tenacious enough that one modern scholar characterized the Anthesteria as "the Blossom-feast in early spring."<sup>43</sup> In any case, the notable oddity of the daisies arranged in a jug designed to contain wine but presumably containing water, as compared to the relative consonance of the roses in a glass vase, invites further inspection.

There is no denying it is a spouted ewer and not a vase or an earthenware pot, but in the sense that it holds the daisies and is endowed with writhing, highly florid forms, it could be construed as a fruitful embodiment of the sacrificial offering at "the pot-feast." Conveniently, the sheaf of wheat at the maenad's feet also can be identified with this ceremonial event. As some nineteenth-century commentators described it, the final evening of the Anthesteria was given over to more solemn business--a mystery rite in which a mixture of honey and flour, most likely ground wheat, was offered to Dionysus.<sup>44</sup> But, while a deliberate convergence of ancient arcana and pictorial image in Harnett's painting would be extremely intriguing, demonstrating a clear link between the Anthesteria and the iconographic program of Ease may be beyond proof.

It also may be impossible to prove that Harnett promoted a revealing look at the Dionysia because it reflected upon the sobering issue of "ease"--in the sense of a release that is emotional and sexual, but not least of all in its intimation of a temporary physical release from slavery. Nevertheless, we shall see that the iconographic program of the painting contains a remarkable number of features that can be linked to the idea of either freedom or slavery. The phrase the Springfield Daily Republican used in describing Ease--"careless confusion"--is not, of course, uncommon in discussions of Harnett's oeuvre. And while the picture would seem to involve a diverse community of objects which, at first glance, appear to have little direct bearing upon one another, Harnett seems to have contrived a series of close, symbiotic relationships which, on the whole, may have been motivated by

iconographic considerations. Although the idea may seem far-fetched, a statistical approach to the composition, taking into account the personal, historical, and iconographic variables involved, might indicate that it is highly unlikely that Harnett would compose a painting in which, purely by accident, so many elements could be related to the binary notion of freedom and slavery. Indeed, one would suppose there is an extremely low probability that even a few of the diverse elements in Ease would overlap in an area as specific as freedom and slavery by chance. From a statistical point of view, then, we may find ourselves obliged to take seriously what might otherwise be dismissed as a mere coincidence or a chance alignment. So much are these connections the case that, in the absence of hard evidence, it may be conjectured that elements such as the image of the Dionysia were intended to have contemporary relevance, to reach forward to the artist's time. After all, Harnett began to paint his grand, complex composition only twenty-five years after Abraham Lincoln had laid the groundwork for the Emancipation Proclamation.

First, it needs to be recalled in this context that the emancipation of the slaves and Lincoln's reputation as "the immortal champion of liberty" was emphatically maintained as part of the heritage of the Republicans, as evidenced in their party platforms from the 1860s to the early 1880s.<sup>45</sup> And Abbe's devotion to the Republican party was one of several conspicuous things about him. Although we have no information on the political stance his family took on the issue of slavery, or on the involvement of members of the Abbe family in the Civil War, James T. Abbe was remembered in an entry in the Encyclopedia of Massachusetts, Biographical-

Genealogical, published in 1916, as a man who "advocated the principles and policies of the Republican party, in the councils of which he took an active part, . . ."46 It is notable also that the pivotal role of the Republican party in the emancipation of the slaves was held up in William Cullen Bryant's and Sydney Howard Gay's four-volume study, A Popular History of the United States (1876-80), the first volume of which Harnett introduced into Ease in the stack of books at the left (Fig. 39). The following quotation is taken from the preface to this first volume.

The friends of slavery demanded that the authority of the master over his bondsman should be recognized in all the territory belonging to the Union not yet formed into States,—in short, that the jurisdiction of the Republic, wherever established, should carry with it the law of slavery. A party [the Republican Party] was immediately formed to resist the application of this doctrine, and after a long and vehement contest elected its candidate [Lincoln] President of the United States.<sup>47</sup>

Earlier, Bryant, a long-standing champion of emancipation and a former Democrat, voiced his feelings about the Republican President's legacy in the poem "The Death of Lincoln," composed within a few days of Lincoln's assassination:

. . . Thy task is done; the bond are free:  
 We bear thee to an honored grave,  
 Whose proudest monument shall be  
 The broken fetters of the slave. . . .<sup>48</sup>

This anti-slavery fervor was at work in the literature and poetry of the pre-Civil War decades too. For example, the Quaker poet and abolitionist John Greenleaf Whittier (whose tome Whittier's Poems Harnett singled out for inclusion in his Still Life with a Letter to Thomas B. Clarke of 1879 [Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts]), celebrated the theme of freedom from slavery in the poem "Massachusetts to Virginia." It grew out of a controversy, as an

author's note explained, over an "alleged fugitive slave" named George Latimer.

. . . Hold, while ye may, your struggling slaves, and burden God's free air  
With woman's shriek beneath the lash, and manhood's wild despair;  
Cling closer to the "cleaving curse" that writes upon your plains  
The blasting of Almighty wrath against a land of chains.

A little later in the same poem Whittier presented a kind of muster list of places in Abbe's home state of Massachusetts, in which, he proclaimed, "A hundred thousand right arms were lifted up on high,-- / A hundred thousand voices sent back their loud reply":

The voice of free, broad Middlesex,--of thousands as of  
one,--  
The shaft of Bunker calling to that of Lexington,--  
From Norfolk's ancient villages, from Plymouth's rocky bound  
To where Nantucket feels the arms of ocean close her round;--  
From rich and rural Worcester, where through the calm repose  
Of cultured vales and fringing woods the gentle Nashua flows,  
To where Wachuset's wintry blasts the mountain larches stir,  
Swelled up to Heaven the thrilling cry of "God save Latimer!"

And sandy Barnstable rose up, wet with the salt sea spray,--  
And Bristol sent her answering shout down Narragansett Bay!  
Along the broad Connecticut old Hampden felt the thrill,  
And the cheer of Hampshire's woodmen swept down from Holyoke Hill.  
The voice of Massachusetts! Of her free sons and daughters,--  
Deep calling unto deep aloud,--the sound of many waters!  
Against the burden of that voice what tyrant power shall stand?  
No fetters in the Bay State! No slave upon her land!<sup>49</sup>

It is not unreasonable to imagine Abbe, who was born in 1849, growing up against such a background of opinion in Springfield, Massachusetts, in the decade of the Civil War and that which immediately preceded it. The effect of this environment on Abbe might well be reflected in his continuing devotion to a political party that was to a degree still governed by the memory of Lincoln and by an undiminished pride in the

accomplishments of his presidency.

Nor is it strange to think that in the late 1880s an artist such as Harnett might enlist the Civil War as a relevant concern, however discreetly. As John Wilmerding has pointed out, the impulse to remember the war, in keeping with American politics and culture at large, proved strong among trompe l'oeil still-life painters in the 1880s.<sup>50</sup> In 1888, for example, one year after Harnett executed Ease, Alexander Pope executed Emblems of the Civil War (Brooklyn Museum), and a year later George Cope (1855-1929) painted a work entitled Union Mementoes on a Door (Private collection). And, of course, allusions to the Civil War, not to mention to Abraham Lincoln, abounded in the art of their contemporary, and Harnett's friend, John Frederick Peto.<sup>51</sup>

Still, we cannot be certain whether the iconographic program in Ease, to the extent that it can be related to the concept of freedom from constraint, was Harnett's or Abbe's idea; perhaps it was conceived co-operatively. We know too little about the terms of the commission to be able to suggest who contributed what ideas to the conception of the painting. We do know that not long before Harnett put the finishing touches on Ease, when he was by no means well, he received a letter about a possible commission from Thomas B. Walker. A lumber baron from Minneapolis with a voracious appetite for art, Walker had some correspondence with Harnett and had been a visitor to his studio.<sup>52</sup> In the letter--the only letter to Harnett still existing--Walker's idea for a memorial picture in honor of his recently deceased son was carefully described from the choice of motifs down to the size of the canvas.

Harnett's response to the inquiry is unknown, but apparently he did not act upon the offer. Whatever the reason, it seems certain that Harnett did not reject the commission because Walker had presumed to suggest to him an iconographic program for the projected painting. Evidence of Harnett working comfortably and effectively with a suggested idea can be found on the back of the photograph of Job Lot Cheap that the artist presented to Edward Taylor Snow, in which he honorably acknowledged his debt to Snow for "the idea" for the painting.<sup>53</sup> We also know that Harnett's Still Life with Bric-a-Brac of 1878 (Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts), like Ease, was composed, at the very least, with a fair share of objects that belonged to the original owner of the painting, William H. Folwell of Philadelphia.<sup>54</sup> As for Ease, it seems conceivable that the work was composed not only with some of Abbe's personal property, but also with his personal concerns in mind.

Alfred Frankenstein, still the commanding presence in Harnett studies when Ease came to light in the early 1970s, harbored no doubt whatsoever of Abbe's influence on the iconography of the picture. However, he could not imagine that such influence was in any way justifiable. On the basis of an old photograph of Ease which had once belonged to John Haberle, Frankenstein announced: "The table is covered with an exceedingly ugly piece of embroidered velvet; the books, the palm leaf fan, and the lamp are commonplace, and the repoussé ewer and cup are hideous." By way of excusing Harnett from charges of banality and tastelessness, he added in the following sentence that, "Comparing the subject matter of this work with two

known Harnetts of 1887 (La Flûte Enchantée [Hirschl & Adler, New York] and Still Life [Mr. and Mrs. Meyer Potamkin, Philadelphia]), one can see again the very dramatic contrast between the artist's own simple, natural taste and the flamboyant taste of his patrons."<sup>55</sup>

In the eyes of his contemporaries, however, Abbe was remembered not only as a patron of the arts, but unflinchingly as "an art connoisseur and critic."<sup>56</sup> Additional evidence that Abbe was prone to taking an active interest in the artistic process comes in an article in Paper World of November 1888. Here we are informed that when the envelope manufacturer commissioned Haberle to paint a replacement for Ease (which had been sold to Collis P. Huntington in the preceding summer<sup>57</sup>) the new acquisition--Grandma's Hearthstone (1890; Detroit Institute of Arts)--promised to "embody some ideas of Mr. Abbe's own originating."<sup>58</sup> In any case, the "faults" which Frankenstein attributed to Ease may have been not so much a consequence of taste or proprietary limitations, but the result of a conscious desire on the part of the patron and/or the artist to make the picture conform to the requirements of a symbolic system.

Before proceeding further, and before one summarily dismisses the idea that Harnett would undertake to translate the broad concept of ease into esoteric moral and political terms, with or without Abbe's suggestions, we should remember that the hidden revelation is an old and venerable concept. Long before Harnett composed and executed Ease the complex subtleties of unplumbed meaning had been cultivated in the Bible. Here, for example, is a famous passage from the gospel of Saint Mark

in the New Testament (which, in turn, was derived from a passage in the book of Isaiah [9-10] in the Old Testament):

And he said unto [his disciples], He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parable. And he said unto them, Unto you is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: That seeing they may see and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven.<sup>59</sup>

Although it may well be impossible to know if Harnett was inspired by, let alone familiar with, this biblical passage, he did bring to Ease a bulky, well-worn Bible, which anchors the composition on the left, and a "copper-hued bronze vase"--a file copy of a tenth-century situla from his own collection of props--bearing the image of none other than Saint Mark, which contains it on the right.<sup>60</sup>

Indeed, we are invited to proceed along the inclined plane of the flute (an instrument which figured frequently in Dionysian celebrations,<sup>61</sup> and on which the repoussé vignette appears to balance) to its mouth, which comes to a halt at the feet of Saint Mark. The point at which the ebony body of the flute meets its cracked ivory head is underscored in front by the stem of the glass vase and behind by the front edge of the violin. The violin is reminiscent of the maenad's stringed instrument, and is topped by a scroll that echoes the water jug's elaborate, spiraling shapes, as well as the curlicue of the rosebud's mouth which is displayed in the space between them. Moreover, the violin could be described as interfacing with the metal ewer, leaning back sociably against a cushion of books which in a supporting role remain largely beyond our range of sight.

This juncture, however, is only an intermediary stage in the composition, for it is the bronze vase, like the metal ewer, that insists on being regarded with special attention. There is first the palm-leaf fan that is set behind it, like a radiant halo behind the head of a saint. This is a common fan, apparently made from a dried palm leaf which was cut to shape and then bound, with its stem transformed into a handle.<sup>62</sup> By its very nature this fan would require for its use the hand of an individual, whether that of a freeman or a slave, and in Harnett's picture it is, of course, in a state of inertia. Still, the fan is lounging against a stack of books where it might serve as a reminder of comfort and repose.<sup>63</sup> The vase before it is tilted in such a way as to allow Saint Mark and the winged lion, his evangelical symbol, to sight their Dionysian counterparts using as a guide not only the luminous, radiate pattern of the fan but the line of the flute. On the face of it the punctilious Saint Mark, a figure evangelically free from the exercise of physical passion, is opposed to the whole spirit of the Dionysian group. But is there a connection between the Dionysia and Saint Mark with respect to the theme of freedom from constraint?

As it happens, there appear to be several links. Just as the Dionysian celebration and Saint Mark's evangelism are connected by the formal line of the flute, so they are ideologically bound by backgrounds that throw into relief the idea of "ease." Of the many legends which involve Saint Mark, two would seem to declare some tentative correspondences to this condition. As we have seen, the Dionysia may be elevated above the level of pagan sexual display by its associations with the practice of temporarily relieving slaves of the burdens of servitude. One legend about

Saint Mark, as recounted in Clara Erskine Clement's A Handbook of Legendary Art in 1881, tells how

a certain slave, whose master resided in Provence, persisted in going to the shrine of St. Mark to pray, for which he was condemned to be tortured. As the sentence was about to be executed, St. Mark descended to save his votary. The executioners were confounded, and the instruments of torture broken and made unfit for use.<sup>64</sup>

We may assume from Clement's account, however, that like the slaves who enjoyed temporary freedoms in ancient Greece, the slave from Provence, while spared the immediate discomforts of torture, continued to endure a life of bondage. And while Saint Mark managed to intercede on behalf of this slave, we are told in another popular late nineteenth-century resource, the Reverend Alban Butler's Lives of the Saints, that he himself "was one day seized by the heathen, dragged by ropes over stones, and thrown into prison." Butler was, not surprisingly, concerned to add: "On the morrow the torture was repeated, and having been consoled by a vision of angels and the voice of Jesus, Saint Mark went to his reward."<sup>65</sup>

This impulse toward relief and liberation is extended beyond the figurative elements on the brass vase and metal ewer through contact with a network of literary references. What follows immediately at the intersection of the vase with Saint Mark and the flute is a volume inscribed "HOMER'S ILIAD" (Fig. 40). The coincidence of iconographic motifs related to the broad-based notion of ease is borne out in a negative sense, as in the episode of Saint Mark's imprisonment, by Homer's epic poem, which is replete with tales of capture--for example, the seizure of women and other booty in raids by Achilles in Lyrnessos, Lesbos, and Skyros.<sup>66</sup> The elopement

of Helen with Paris itself is often considered an abduction. It just may be that Harnett picked the title Homer's Iliad because the name Homer in Greek—"Homeros"—means "hostage," a fact which did not escape the attention of nineteenth-century criticism.<sup>67</sup> Interestingly enough, the book's spine originally read "ILIAD HOMER." and it is at least possible that Harnett changed it to "HOMER'S ILIAD" because in this form the length of the author's name, with an apostrophe and an "s," more closely approximates the number of ems in Homeros. Not only are these motifs linked by intimations of constraint and confinement, but by the angular rhythms emanating from the formal arrangement of the book, the flute, and the tilted vase, which are echoed by the ray-like pattern of pleats in the palm-leaf fan.

In the ascent from the flute's mouth on the right to its silver-tipped end on the left Harnett obliges us to traverse the length of the composition. In the process we are surely invited to note that each end of the flute is supported by works of poetry: Homer's Iliad, on the one hand, and Scott's Poetical Works, on the other. It is worth noting that although Homer chronicles the heroic age of Greece and Scott the chivalric days and knights of medieval Europe, both were inspired by military themes. Homer's Iliad, generally speaking, deals with a few weeks of the Greeks's ten-year siege of Troy; and Scott, who was known for his attachment to martial affairs, takes up more than a few military exploits in his Poetical Works. In acknowledging the Scottish poet's military concerns and literary achievement, Gilbert Sproat, writing in the centenary of Scott's birth in 1871, stated, matter-of-factly, that,

If fighting and stories about fighting are, unhappily, always to interest mankind. SCOTT's descriptions of warfare are likely to be appreciated permanently, on

account of their vigour, picturesqueness and good taste. He writes the three best accounts in English, perhaps in any language, of a duel, of a skirmish and of a battle—namely the duel of Roderick and Fitz-James, the skirmish of Beal' an Duine, and the battle of Flodden.<sup>68</sup>

Accordingly, the Family Library of Poetry and Song, compiled and edited in 1870 by William Cullen Bryant, included under the heading "War" more selections from the poetry of Scott than from any other writer of poetry. It is not surprising, then, that among the excerpts in this section was "Beal' an Duine" from The Lady of the Lake.<sup>69</sup> And, as in Homer's Iliad, subcurrents of captivity can be found in Scott's poetical works, including The Lady of the Lake where, for instance, the minstrel Allan-bane described the "Battle of Beal' an Duine" at the request of Roderick Dhu, the mortally wounded and imprisoned Chieftain of the Clan Alpine.<sup>70</sup>

Significantly, however, the same late nineteenth-century American audience that might turn to the frequently reprinted Family Library of Poetry and Song and, in an atmosphere of domestic comfort, embrace the adventure and innocent joys of Scott's poetry, could be given to second thoughts. For example, an unbending display of acrimony toward Scott is found in Mark Twain's Life on the Mississippi (1883), in which the author declared flatly that,

It was Sir Walter that made every gentleman in the South a Major, or a Colonel, or a General, or a Judge, before the war; and it was he, also, that made these gentlemen value these bogus decorations. For it was he that created rank and caste down there, and also reverence for rank and caste, and pride and pleasure in them.

By way of clinching the matter Twain went so far as to charge that

Sir Walter had so large a hand in making Southern character, as it existed before the war, that he is in great measure responsible for the war. It seems a little harsh toward a dead man to say that we never should have had any war but for

Sir Walter; and yet something of a plausible argument might, perhaps, be made in support of that wild proposition.<sup>71</sup>

That wild proposition seems to assume ironical force in Harnett's painting, for Scott's Poetical Works is located only a hairsbreadth away from Bryant's Popular History of the United States/Vol. 1 (Fig. 41), which employed the issue of slavery in America as a leitmotif. Moreover, Bryant and his co-author Gay devoted seven chapters of the fourth and final volume of their Popular History to the Civil War, and closed with a facsimile of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. But inasmuch as Harnett specifically identified the author as Bryant and the text in his painting as "Vol. 1" (like A Study Table in this respect, where we were adroitly directed to Don Quixote/Tome IV), it may be worth turning to the first volume of A Popular History of the United States and quoting at length from the preface, which was written by Bryant alone:

It is our purpose to present within a moderate compass a view of changes, political and social, occurring within our Republic, which have an interest for every nation in the civilized world, and the history of which could not be fully written until now. In the two centuries and a half of our existence as an offshoot of the great European stock, a mighty drama has been put upon the stage of our continent, which, after a series of fierce contentions and subtle intrigues, closed in a bloody catastrophe with a result favorable to liberty and human rights and to the fair fame of the Republic. Within that time the institution of slavery, grew to be a gigantic power claiming and exercising dominion over the confederacy, and at last, when it failed in causing itself to be recognized as a national institution and saw the signs of a decline in its political supremacy, declaring the Union of the States dissolved, encountering the free States in a sanguinary five years' war, and bringing upon itself overthrow and utter destruction.

We stand therefore at a point in our annals where the whole duration of slavery in our country from the beginning to the end, lies before us as on a chart; and certainly no history of our Republic can now be regarded as complete which should fail to carry the reader through the various stages of its existence, from its silent and stealthy origin to the stormy period in which the world saw

its death-struggle, and recognized in its fall the sentence of eternal justice.<sup>72</sup>

As Bryant saw it:

A history like this would have been incomplete and fragmentary had it failed to record the final fate as well as the rise and growth of an institution wielding so vast an influence both in society and politics, with champions so able and resolute, organized with such skill, occupying so wide and fertile a domain and rooted there with such firmness as to be regarded by the friends of human liberty with a feeling scarcely short of despair. . . . Few episodes in the world's history have been so complete in themselves as this of American slavery. Few have brought into activity such mighty agencies, or occupied so vast a theatre, or been closed, although amid fearful carnage, yet in a manner so satisfactory to the sense of natural justice.<sup>73</sup>

But there is more. Wedged between Bryant's Popular History of the United States/Vol. 1 and the thick, heavy Bible beneath it is a plain, "light-brown leather book." This book extends precariously over the edge of the Bible; its edge uplifts the end of Bryant's Popular History which at the same time prevents the leather volume from tipping over the brink. We should remember that the reporter for the Springfield Daily Republican identified this volume as "the old account book of Thomas Noble, once governor of Indiana (and the grandfather of Mr. [George Noble] Tyner, Mr. Abbe's partner)." The reporter certified further that this account book "contains the record of 'Black Tom's and Sarah's children'--Black Tom having been a slave of Mr. Noble in Kentucky and one of the originals of Mrs. Stowe's 'Uncle Tom'."<sup>74</sup> It should be noted that Thomas George Noble, the grandfather of George Noble Tyner, was never governor of Kentucky; that was a distinction which belonged to Tyner's great uncle (Thomas George Noble's brother) Noah Noble.<sup>75</sup> Even still, one can scarcely exaggerate the significance of this testimony, for the theory that Harnett's Ease embraces the idea of emancipation as a species of ease

comes to life in a most vivid way through this eagerly repeated story. Although one would not have expected the unassuming leather book to yield such an account, the reporter's note gives to the picture an additional resonance by means of this distant connection to characters in Harriet Beecher Stowe's moralizing anti-slavery novel, Uncle Tom's Cabin, which appeared with much controversy and discussion in 1852.

Fittingly, Bryant's text and the "old account book of Thomas Noble" combine in strange agreement in Harnett's painting. Despite gross inequities between the rich grandeur of Bryant's Popular History, "a volume bound in green with gilt title" (to use the Springfield reporter's words), and the worn brown account book from which any evidence of a title—if it ever existed—has been effaced, Harnett took pains to link them together: He made the gold-tooled line immediately above Bryant's name contiguous with the edge of the account book, and reinforced this line by the raised band in the binding above it. If, as Twain suggested, the words of Scott though uttered from afar, weighed heavily upon the history of the United States, so in Harnett's picture Bryant's Popular History of the United States/Vol. 1 is made to bear the burden of Scott's Poetical Works. It seems appropriate to point out that Scott's work and Bryant's text are plainly separated by an illegible, slender publication in an orange cover. The edition of Scott's poetry and the orange volume beneath it run in a mated parallelism, aligned at an angle to the picture plane which is slightly at odds with that of Bryant's Popular History.

Even so, the account book of Thomas Noble, as we have noted before, is not only shown pinioned under the weight of these three volumes, but can be seen as

a fulcrum which precipitates their teetering to the right. Their descent proceeds through the white modular expanse of an overturned book to the white rectangle of an envelope poised at the edge and level of the table. Near at hand, in the space between the white envelope and the Bible on the left, is a smoldering cigar planted with calculated, rectilinear care on a newspaper. It is poised between two burnt matches and just outside the shadow cast by the huge Bible, which in combination with the listing books adds a cloistral depth to this area of the composition. Since the cigar has already burned a hole in the paper, it presents us with an urgent sense of the moment, and one which did not, we will recall, escape the attention of the reporter for the Springfield Daily Republican:

The spectator's immediate impulse is to step forward and remove the lighted cigar which has just been laid down upon the newspaper, and which has already burned a circle in the paper. The fire is not more perfect in counterfeit, however, than the ash over it and the grain of the wrapper of the excellent cigar; and it fairly seems as if one smelt the fragrance of the smoke that rises,--a little hurt, perhaps, by the mingling of the paper odor.<sup>76</sup>

The feel of the wrapper's grain, the smell of the (now-vanished) smoke, the susurrations, one might imagine, of the burning paper--these are the senses elicited by a visual acuity that was surely meant to heighten the sense of urgency. And it is here that the artist introduced into the composition the newspaper and water-stained sheet of music which spill over the edge of the table--elements that make the space appear, as in other paintings by Harnett, to project illusionistically toward the viewer.

It is essential to notice that Harnett allowed the pronounced illusionism of the newspaper as it operates in three-dimensional space to take precedence over any items which might be encountered on its creased page. When Harnett comes to

defining the newspaper, it is not by reference to a masthead or headline but by way of an illusionism that draws it nearer the spectator. And thus, while the newspaper is lacking in legibility, it is far from a hermetic and private distraction. We may notice not only that the lower left-hand corner of the white envelope points vector-like to the newspaper but that its bottom edge is neatly adjoined to the blank space between two columns of "printed matter." To read literally between the lines is to find a division marked by the circle burned in the paper. At the same time, the newspaper is hemmed in from below by the border design of the table cover. Here, in the left corner of the table cover, Harnett discreetly worked the helmet into the design of the fabric. At the crest of the woven helmet is a trefoil ornament, which is immediately echoed by a trefoil adornment along the edge of the decorative border. Resembling arrowheads as much as threefold leaves, both devices are pointed in the direction of the newspaper and even more particularly at the cigar. Harnett seems to insist on bringing us back to this poignant feature, inviting us--physically as well as psychologically--to take up the vital issue of the newspaper and cigar.

Read in the context of Harnett's propensity for puns, the caprice of a lit cigar on a newspaper might represent a more emblematic combination than may at first appear. One might hazard the guess that the cigar burning a hole in the paper invokes, literally, the idea of the "burning question" of the day. (The Oxford English Dictionary defines "burning question" as "one that is under hot discussion, or about which the public are excited," and all three instances of its use are drawn from Harnett's era.<sup>77</sup>) We must observe, too, not only that the newspaper begins to push

toward us, but that it serves as a foil for the cigar and spent matches. It is through the paper, which we may imagine has some bearing upon current events, that Harnett brings us to a consideration of this minute drama. Using a cast of inanimate forms, he presents a scene unfolding at a moment so early in the course of things that one cannot fail to notice, as did the reporter for the Springfield Daily Republican, that "the lighted cigar . . . has just [italics mine] been laid down upon a newspaper." It should be noted as well that the burnt matches seem casually disposed beside the cigar, like headless debris on a battlefield. The fresh match, however, instead of appearing as if by chance, is utterly fixed in a position mirroring the cigar, its stark whiteness isolated against a bare region of the table cover. The orderly disposition of the cigar and unburnt match--symmetrically arranged on either side of the white envelope and along the same plane--hints at a continuous and related dimension of experience. Indeed, together with the dead matches they suggest to us the constituent elements of time: the past, symbolized by the defunct matches, the present by the smoldering cigar, and the future by the unignited match whose moment, in contradistinction to the other matches, has yet to come. (The same idea is perhaps purposively paralleled by Peto in Lincoln and the Star of David [1904; Private collection], in which we find near the whittled date "1904," in ascending order, a burnt match, a smoldering cigarette, and an unspent match.) In Ease, as if to underscore the confluence of time, Harnett enlarged the temporal dimension to include the newspaper and sheet music below the cigar and matches, which push aggressively toward us. That the folio of music is thoroughly absorbed in the past is revealed by

its lineage of water stains, testimony of some previous calamity. The music is the more resonant since it depicts a melody from Bellini's La Sonnambula which opens, appropriately enough, with the words "Vi ravviso, o luoghi ameni" (Oh remembrance of scenes long vanished).<sup>78</sup> Overlaying the sheet music is the newspaper which, as we have noted, can be read as an emblem of current events or, tentatively, as a burning issue of the time.

A temporal context surfaces as well in the white and blue envelopes, presumably of Abbe's own manufacture, on which Harnett playfully fixed postmarks of Holyoke, Massachusetts, and the year 1887, thereby addressing Abbe's involvement in the Holyoke Envelope Company as well as the date of the painting. It is reasonable to assume the white envelope at least is a modern "self-sealing" envelope, which the Holyoke Envelope Company manufactured in remarkable number,<sup>79</sup> and which superseded the old-fashioned seal of molten wax. For the journal Paper World, viewing the enterprise of the Holyoke Envelope Company in April 1888 as it rose phoenix-like from the ashes of a disastrous fire, commercial hope was at work nowhere more than in the company's vast production of self-sealing envelopes, a by-product of modern progress. "The self-sealing envelope is in common and universal use," it reported, although "wax and seal are still affected by many, . . ."<sup>80</sup> It is interesting to note that in contrast to the up-to-date white gummed-flap envelope in Ease, the back of which is untouched by sealing wax, Harnett's The Secretary's Table (1879; Preston Morton Collection, Santa Barbara Museum of Art) presents what might then be perceived as either old-fashioned or as

an affectation: the appearance on the writing table of a candle, a stick of red wax, and an envelope with a sealed red-wax wafer.

With this, we shift from the precisely turned postmark on the back of the white envelope to the indistinct stamp on the blue one behind it. As part of the quotidian minutiae that punctuated Abbe's and Harnett's everyday life, the stamp has heretofore escaped notice. Admittedly, the image on the stamp is blurred and rendered even more vague by being cancelled, but it can be determined that gazing toward the left through this camouflage of cancellation stripes is the person of George Washington. It is clear that Harnett undertook to represent an actual stamp, as he did in The Artist's Letter Rack of 1879 (Metropolitan Museum of Art) and proceeded to do in Mr. Hulings' Rack Picture of 1888 (Collection of Jo Ann and Julian Ganz Jr.). In The Artist's Letter Rack, Harnett included a two-cent "Andrew Jackson" and a three-cent "George Washington," both of which were issued between 1870 and 1887; in Mr. Hulling's Rack Picture, he used as models the 1883 two-cent "Washington" and the pre-1883 one-cent "Benjamin Franklin."<sup>81</sup> That the stamp on the envelope in Ease is indeed the two-cent stamp with a bust of Washington, and not the two-cent stamp with Jackson, is confirmed by the angling lines which proceed away from the numeral "2" at the base of the central medallion, a distinguishing feature of the "Washington" stamp (Fig. 39).

It seems appropriate to mention with regard to Harnett's choice of a stamp in Ease that both Washington and Jackson had been chosen to adorn Confederate stamps issued during the Civil War. However, Washington, in conspicuous contrast

to the goals of the Confederacy, had taken upon himself the task of providing the large fund necessary under Virginia law to cover the freeing of his slaves after his wife, Martha's, death.<sup>82</sup> Although Harnett makes no overt allusion to this provision, Washington's concern for his slaves would be in keeping with the self-exculpating action of Noah Noble, Abbe's partner's great uncle, which was a topic of interest in the 1880s. The subject was addressed by William Wesley Woollen in 1883.

Governor [Noah] Noble's father [Dr. Thomas Noble of Boone County, Kentucky] was a slaveholder, and some of the negroes once owned by him, and with whom the Governor had played when a boy, were sold out of the family. After Governor Noble had removed to Indianapolis he sought out these negroes, bought them, and brought them to his home. He looked after them while he lived, saw they wanted for nothing necessary for their comfort, and in his will provided for their maintenance and support. This incident illustrates his goodness and kindness of heart, and his interest in the race which for centuries had worn the bondsman's yoke.<sup>83</sup>

Despite the fact that George Noble Tyner's genealogy was misstated in the Springfield Daily Republican of 7 November 1887, and the possibility that his grandfather's (or great-uncle's) relationship to Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Uncle Tom" was invented, Woollen validates the allusion to slavery which is brought before us in the "account book of Thomas Noble." Woollen provides us with an index of Noah Noble's attitude toward slavery, which, in a general way, recalls Washington's expression of compassion for his slaves, and was an attitude which would seem to have been a source of family pride for Tyner and of sympathetic interest to Abbe.

The stamp with the cancelled image of Washington, one should note, lies within the curving lines of the ewer's base and just beyond the shadow cast by the white envelope, a sort of dead area between the staggered envelopes. And yet,

looked at from another point of view, this dark expanse is not only aligned along the vertical axis of the wine jug, but echoes the curvature of the line of its base as well as the distended adumbration of the newspaper on the sheet music below. As such, it serves as a transition between the top and bottom halves of the composition, a linchpin that sustains the picture's main vertical axis. Moreover, it seems to mark this line more or less as a boundary, a brief state between the realm of the past on the right and that of the present on the left. There is first, just to the right of this central axis, the maenad pictured on the ewer and the bust of Washington on the stamp. These two habitants of the stamp and ewer, respectively, are not only placed in vertical alignment but are triangulated by the biblical figure of Saint Mark on the brass vase. All three figures--pagan, secular, and sacred--are shown in profile, facing leftward. Ensnared in the matrix of the past, the glances of all three guide us toward the left, toward the ever-widening field of the present. It is on this side of the composition, in the background, that Harnett reserves a place for a contemporary furnishing--a student lamp--which is diagonally opposed by the candle snuffers in the right foreground, shown peering out from the brass vase. The left side of the composition also yields the lit cigar and newspaper which, as we have seen, reveal in an alarming way a sense of the contemporary moment.

Thus, if Harnett was concerned in Ease with the overshadowing question of freedom from constraint, it is the sweep of time and history that provided his framework. When we meander through the composition one is not only struck by intimations of bygone ages and the modern era, but by a reading of the present that

recalls the past. From Bryant's Popular History of the United States/Vol. 1 and the account book of Thomas Noble to the relief images of the Dionysia and Saint Mark, the iconography of the painting is colored by successive echoings of experience which declare that slavery is an old human institution, an enterprise which has endured over the course of human history. Even if it were invoked in a way more obvious than the resonant presence of Bryant's Popular History or what the reporter for the Daily Republican asserted was a reference to the history of Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Uncle Tom," the end of slavery in the United States would by no means constitute the crowning achievement in this seemingly eternal quest for freedom. Rather, it seems that such an instance appears in Ease as merely part of that endless cycle of human history in which the pervasive sufferings of captives and slaves may be forestalled or revised, but, nevertheless, remain. In this dismal light, the title Odyssey, with its association with the siege of Troy, and Bryant's Popular History of the United States, a book filled with references to slavery and the Civil War, may reflect abbreviated moments in the history of humankind which will be followed by the relentless certainty of a new wave of constraints or servitude. By juxtaposing the cigar and burned circle with the fresh match, and with a fan at the ready, Harnett seems concerned to show that whatever the present state of affairs may be, some new peril to freedom could flair up at any moment.

The matter, however, does not end there. There is a still larger implication in Ease, namely, that a new stage of freedom, achieved through resurrection after death, is within our grasp--an idea which would not be out of place

in Harnett's work in the 1880s. Indeed, by promulgating the bleak and unsettling idea that human history consists of an endless series of repetitions, in which constraints on freedom remain invariant, it becomes impossible to ignore the spiritual presences in Ease which seem to offer the last, and most enduring, hope for emancipation. It starts at the right with the elevated attitude of Saint Mark who, the Handbook of Christian Symbolism of 1865 tells us, "dwells upon the Resurrection of Christ and thereby claims the Lion, which, . . . was accepted in early times as a symbol of the Resurrection."<sup>84</sup> As mentioned earlier, Saint Mark was indeed received into Heaven following his imprisonment and subsequent martyrdom. Whatever associations the palm-leaf fan behind Saint Mark may have in Ease, it is important to note that the palm was known as the symbol of martyrdom,<sup>85</sup> which is the torturous route to redemption. Also, it must be pointed out that Saint Mark's upraised gaze is not only guided by the flute toward the metal ewer near the center of the composition, but also toward the modern student lamp in the background at the left. While the lamp (like the candle) had traditional associations of transience, it may have been used in this context to convey the idea of the "Word of God as a lamp unto the faithful."<sup>86</sup>

Another hint of the religious solution to the problem of worldly limitations, of which the central ones here are social and political, is conveyed by the large ancestral Bible, the cornerstone of the composition on the left. Harnett reinforced the role of the Bible as a wellspring of spiritual salvation by means of a largely inconspicuous but nevertheless emphatic formal pattern. As the boundaries of the sheet music vanish beneath the newspaper its outline is taken over by the horizontal

crease in the paper and by the bottom edge of the white envelope, both of which converge at the cigar. The structure of this overall pattern points like a divining rod to the Bible. Moreover, it is an effect enhanced by the horizontal and vertical creases on the newspaper which discreetly combine to form a crucifix. It may likewise be significant that the smoke, which rose from the end of the cigar farthest from the Bible, can be interpreted as a symbol of the transience of earthly life. In contrast to the transitory overtones of the flowers and smoke, the presence of the Bible, implies that it is through resurrection after death that one achieves ultimate spiritual freedom. In this sense, the legacy of slavery, as brought before us in Bryant's Popular History and "the old account book of Thomas Noble," rests upon such pious hope as is represented by the old Bible. Since we began with the premise that the metal jug topped with flowers was of central importance, it is only natural that we return to this feature. The flowers, a motif traditionally associated with mortality and transience, and the aureate ewer are also in keeping with the prospect of death and resurrection, for the unseen but presiding spirit of the Dionysia is, of course, Dionysos, among other things "the god of renewed vegetation."<sup>87</sup> This association between Dionysos and resurrection is succinctly described by G. Van Hoorn in Choes and Anthesteria: "The return of the dead from the nether world coincides with a rite [the choetroe, alluded to earlier] celebrated during the Anthesteria: the resurrection of Dionysos himself from the dead."<sup>88</sup> It is perhaps ironic that when a commentator for the Cincinnati Commercial Gazette cited Ease in a review of the art gallery of the Cincinnati Centennial Exposition in 1888, he viewed it in the context of "the dead,"

but from a perspective that ignored its rich and manifold iconography and instead focused solely on matters of aesthetic theory. Repeating the formulaic terms of disapproval that Cook had served up earlier, he wrote:

It may likewise be said that mere detail and careful workmanship, in other words, essentially dead art in its mechanical fidelity to nature, as seen in "Ease" . . . by Harnett, will always excite the public. Nevertheless, it is art lacking in the qualities which attract the genuine artist, who seeks to reproduce nature with sufficient resemblance, while he preserves that most essential quality, the appearance of vitality in his work.<sup>89</sup>

We will recall that two years earlier Harnett's The Old Violin had been received with great fanfare at the Thirteenth Cincinnati Industrial Exposition. The writer's negative commentary may have been motivated by lingering resentment of its popular and critical success, which was even to be encountered in the pages of the Commercial Gazette.

While writers continued to offer views of Harnett's work that stressed the parochial concerns of contemporary artistic taste, the promise of resurrection was a theme that he seems to have formulated again. Perhaps the clearest expression of this outlook may be found in The Old Cupboard Door of 1889 (Fig. 12), one of his last and most monumental works. In a composition stocked with the paraphernalia of a typical vanitas picture--old books, musical instruments, sheet music, a statuette, a shell, a rose, a candlestick, and snuffers--we again find texts that reflect upon the transience of earthly life. Affixed crookedly to the cupboard door, for instance, is a sheet of music with both Thomas Moore's "[La] Dernière Ro[se d'été]" (The Last Rose of Summer) and Vincenzo Bellini's tragic opera Norma, each of which deals with death in one form or another. Overhead, Harnett reveals in the collection "30

Petits Morceaux" the aria "che farò senza Euridice?" from Christoph Gluck's Orphée, an opera based on the mythical story of the poet and musician Orpheus and his wife Eurydice, which is fraught with dolorous overtones of death.

This focus on the subject of death does not mean, of course, that The Old Cupboard Door is free of Harnett's humor, any more than Job Lot Cheap or Bard of Avon are devoid of comic elements. Even here there is in title "30 Petits Morceaux" (30 Little Pieces) a rather wicked pun. As the story goes, after Orpheus failed in his attempt to rescue Eurydice from the underworld, "his grief for his wife was so great that he scorned the Thracian women, and they in revenge tore him to pieces in their Bacchic feasts."<sup>90</sup> Since it is not clear from the mythological record in just how many pieces Orpheus ended up, Harnett may have tendered thirty little pieces as his unofficial estimate. The allusion to Orpheus is made the more emphatic both for the presence of Bacchus and for the imprint of a lyre on the hanging cover of a volume of "Shakspeare"--the nethermost element in the composition. In keeping with Harnett's artistic strategy, this device is to be directly experienced and questioned. We may be reminded that it was because of Orpheus's enchanting play on the lyre that Eurydice was allowed to return from Hades, although she ultimately fell back to the nether world when, against his word, Orpheus turned to look at her before crossing the Styx. But Gluck's Orphée may have served Harnett in even more intricate ways. For one thing, the opera, in contrast to the mythological account, ends on a happy note: Orpheus's untimely display of affection is treated as a test of faith, which he passes, and in consequence Amor restores Eurydice to life and to her adoring husband. Thus

the opera's usefulness to Harnett might have been raised by the idea of resurrection, for Gluck's Orphée helps generate that mixture of gloom and hope which had already begun to occupy his attention by the early 1880s.

Just above and to the right of the book of "Shakspere," standing slightly askew near the front edge of the shelf, is a copy of Don Quixote. It is not Cervantes's Don Quixote/Tome IV, but as its loose frontispiece proclaims, a Spanish edition of his novel entitled Vida, Y Hechos del Ingen[ioso] Cavallero Do[n Quix]ote. The beginning of the title, "Vida, Y Hechos" (Life, and Exploits), is appropriate for a prominent position in the center of the shelf insofar as Harnett sets up a dialogue between the objects on the right and those on the left. The very first word, "Vida," seems to invite reflection upon the vivid symbols of earthly life on the left, which include elements representing various arts of mankind--music (the bow and the violin above it), art (the bronze statuette), and literature (the books)--and the turban shell as an object of natural, worldly beauty. What is revealing is that the man-made beauty of the statuette is complemented by the common turban shell whose rough exterior has been stripped by human hands to its mother-of-pearl interior, and which is the more attractive because its surface has been made smooth and polished.<sup>91</sup> Indeed, the picture of the good life is represented by the joyful image of Bacchus whose cup, it would seem, hath runneth over.

This idea is the more striking in that Bacchus is merely a bronze statuette, and in fact, to paraphrase Magritte, it is not a bronze statuette but only a painting of one. If the figure of Bacchus appears slightly inebriated, it is not from real wine but

from imaginary wine, a vintage as illusory as the pleasures of life. It seems worth adding that the silhouette of the missing portion of the hinge at the left echoes, like a cast shadow, the upraised arm of Bacchus. One cannot help wondering if the vanished piece of hinge is thus an attempt on Harnett's part to comment dialogically on the emptiness of Bacchus's salutary gesture.

By the turn of Bacchus's head Harnett proceeds to return us to the frontispiece of Cervantes's book, and toward the region of death on the right. There, with the word "Hechos," the "exploits" of Don Quixote can be seen slipping quite literally into shadow and obscurity. Just as Harnett gave to the statuette of Bacchus a rather complex and subtle play on reality, he also allowed Cervantes's novel to operate on several ingenious levels as well. Like the dangling cover of the volume of "Shakspere" on the left, not to mention the nymph Eurydice whose fate hangs on the instrument of Orpheus which is imprinted on it, the book's loose leaves are also at risk, and, by implication, so is the future of Don Quixote's adventures. It is appropriate to notice that the gallant exploits of Cervantes's mad protagonist were themselves only illusory, and thus function as another extension of the philosophic course Harnett's painting describes. As we move further to the right the inevitability of death is indicated by the rose which has lost a petal, and much more emphatically in the age-old symbol of a candle which has long since been snuffed out. We may be reminded that Shakespeare, whose "Trag[edies]/Son[nets]" on the left is turned into a base for the pageantry of Bacchus, used the device of the guttered candle as a reminder of mortality, and as a suitable background to vanity in his famous tragedy

Macbeth:

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow  
 Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,  
 To the last syllable of recorded time;  
 And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
 The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!  
 Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
 That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,  
 And then is heard no more; it is a tale  
 Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
 Signifying nothing.<sup>92</sup>

As usual, Harnett in The Old Cupboard Door confronts the actual and the tangible, assimilating the various textures of our lives into the framework of his picture. And indeed, the shallow restricted space of the composition and its illusionistically projecting shelf, which appears conjoined to the viewer's world, further heighten the sense of reality which pervades the painting. As in A Study Table, not to mention Ease, The Old Cupboard Door features a mix that exhibits the qualities we identify with the Five Senses, the vital means by which we perceive the everyday world. The books which we come to know by reading and the corner of the sheet music which can be seen through the well-oiled, translucent tambourine may allude to the sense of sight, the bow resting against the tambourine to that of touch, the cup of wine held high by the bronze figure of Bacchus to the sense of taste as well as touch, the rose to the sense of smell, and the musical instruments and sheet music to hearing. In these works, moreover, as real and present as the assembly of elements may appear and as pleasant as indulging sensate reality may seem, the viewer is left in doubt about the importance of these insignificant objects.

In this respect, Harnett's The Old Cupboard Door is a pictorial descendant

of Charles Bird King's Poor Artist's Cupboard of about 1815 (Fig. 19), not only because of its cupboard setting--but the insistent allusions to vanitas and the Five Senses that pervade both works. Indeed, the kinship is much enhanced by the fact that Harnett had direct access to King's painting, which hung in the Philadelphia home of William B. Bement, the industrialist and collector who commissioned The Old Cupboard Door.<sup>93</sup> In general, King's work reflects unfavorably upon the condition of the contemporary artist, indicating his poverty and vain hopes in the face of public indifference. As an emblematic statement, it presents an iconographic program fundamental to the workings of vanitas and its related associations, melancholy and the Five Senses.<sup>94</sup> The niche is filled with a seemingly untidy assemblage of stuff and books, among which can be found such suggestive titles as Miseries of Life, Advantages of Poverty/Third Part, Pleasures of Hope, Signs of the Times, and Lives of Painters. And mentioned in the sheriff's sale notice tacked above the niche on the upper left--the lower right-hand corner of which curls suggestively into the dark recess immediately after its title is read--is a Sermon on the Vanity of Human Pursuits. In addition to the role of these titles as a counterpoint to the artist's worldly ambitions, there is a copy of Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy and, in the apex of the niche, an unseen print with the exposed label "Laughing Philosopher," which refers to Democritus, a classical figure traditionally associated with both melancholy and vanitas imagery.<sup>95</sup>

And yet, it is possible that Harnett is directing us to more in The Old Cupboard Door than the vanity of life arising from the certainty of death. He

introduced into the painting a clear-cut diagonal that effectively separates the work into realms that present themselves in terms of the earth and the heavens. If we conceive the composition as divided along the diagonal line of the bow, the open area above the tambourine would seem to suggest that the two planes are not mutually exclusive. The round tambourine may be the idea of the moon, and its oily, mottled surface the lunar landscape, which is seen rising above the shelf that includes both terrestrial inhabitants, such as Bacchus and the rose, and the aquatic shell. Above the title "[La] Dernière Ro[se d'été]," partially eclipsed by the tambourine, is the heading "Air Ir[landais] that begins with a word which not only refers to a melody or tune but hints at the mixture of invisible gases that surround the earth. In the course of our ascendancy through these spheres we have progressed to a level at which sheet music and a musical instrument are suspended on nails, like stars fixed in the firmament of the cupboard door, rather than standing or lying on the "earthly" plane. While they are part of the transient world, these motifs invite us toward a contemplation of music as an experience both pure and incorporeal, and as a time-honored symbol of "heavenly harmony."

But Harnett may have carried the matter further still. Over and above the accumulation of articles in The Old Cupboard Door is a key at the upper right, separated from the rest of the assembly and intended, perhaps, to be recognized as the key that unlocks the "truth" behind the picture's illusions. This motif suggests that something lies beyond the formal and prescribed limits of Harnett's painting, and grasping the key we may be allowed to seek further, to inquire, by an act of the

imagination which turns the lock, into the nature of this unseen order. In doing so we enlarge the dimensions of the picture beyond the surface to include the dark recesses of the cupboard, and in the process move from a finite world of visual appearance to an infinite, cosmic realm of transcendent imagination. Surely we are allowed to consider the possibility that the key is emblematic of one of Saint Peter's keys of heaven, not the key of excommunication but that of absolution. As such, Harnett gets more mileage out of the reference to Orpheus in the sheet music to the left of the key, for in Harnett's time this pagan thaumaturge also was understood as a symbol of Christ. Of the tale of Orpheus, to cite only one example, a nineteenth-century commentator declared that,

here was a story which to a mind trained to figurative and allegorical subjects, seemed in many ways to point to the character and history of our Blessed LORD. He Who commanded the powers of Nature, Whom the winds and the waves obeyed, at Whose bidding the lion should lie down with the lamb, and peace should reign in the world; Who again, in His ardent love for the soul of man, stung to death by the bite of a serpent, that old serpent, the Devil, overcame death and Himself descended into hell, to bring man's lost soul; back to heaven and happiness; it was He, I say, Whom this history seemed to foreshadow; so that all these points of resemblance suggested Orpheus to the minds of the early Christians, as a fitting symbol under which to represent our LORD Himself.<sup>96</sup>

Finally, despite Harnett's attention here as elsewhere to the look and feel of the visible world, he brings us to a consideration of the cupboard door as a plane that mediates between the visible and worldly and the invisible and spiritual; between that which explicitly reaches out to us on the one hand, and that which implicitly lies beyond our grasp on the other. The hopefulness of the composition's upward movement, its suggestion of spiritual ascent culminates in the key. And indeed, when

the key is put to work and the old cupboard door is opened, the worldly objects on the shelf will perforce be swept away.

Such a venture into the allegorical domain of the cupboard may also lie behind the last painting Harnett completed before his death: his Old Models of 1892 (Fig. 7). It has been argued that Harnett utilized the cupboard format in Old Models with more subtlety than he did in The Old Cupboard Door.<sup>97</sup> The size of Old Models is neither as tall nor as wide as that of its predecessor, in part because Harnett eliminated the illusionistically painted strips of plaster and wainscoting which in The Old Cupboard Door had surrounded the cupboard's frame at the top and sides. But he also scaled down the sum of its parts, allowing the general theme of the painting to take precedence over the multiplicity of local detail which one meets in The Old Cupboard Door. And yet, it is perhaps revealing that while this painting was identified by the title Old Models in the Birch catalogue of 1893, as early as 1898 it was mistaken for The Old Cupboard Door.<sup>98</sup> This confusion is the more understandable in that both works share the cupboard format, which is seldom encountered in Harnett's oeuvre (or in American art for that matter); both were stamped with the imprint of age; and both were painted toward the end of the artist's career. The problem may have been compounded by a certain urgency and carelessness to the obituary comments about Harnett's pictures. For example, a writer for the New York Times took the occasion of Harnett's death to recall some of the artist's better known paintings, among them The Old Cupboard Door owned by Bement: "It portrayed with wonderful accuracy the interior of an old-fashioned

cupboard containing a variety of objects."<sup>99</sup> In this brief description the obituary writer betrays evidence that, as might be expected, he either had not seen the picture or could not remember it clearly if he had, for The Old Cupboard Door, like Old Models, presents the exterior, not the interior, of a cupboard. But the main point here is that the writer's gloss on the painting is general enough that it could be applied to either of Harnett's cupboard pictures. Given that similarities do in fact exist between the two paintings, it seems fair to ask if Old Models, like The Old Cupboard Door, supports a symbolic program which might also be related to the transience of earthly life.

By way of exploring this question, it may be remarked that while The Old Cupboard Door and Old Models have been confused with one another, it was unquestionably the latter picture that was included in a show of nineteenth- and twentieth-century American paintings, held at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. in 1949. During the course of the exhibition the visiting public was invited to cast votes for their favorite works and to record brief explanations for their choices. Much to the chagrin of the organizers, though evidently not to their surprise, Harnett's Old Models was selected overwhelmingly as the public's favorite. Eleanor B. Swenson, in an effort to explain the paralyzing effect of Harnett's work, analyzed the results of the poll in the following way:

Judging by the reasons written on the ballots, the common denominator of the top six pictures, and the basis for their popularity, was realism, whether of subject or of style. The phrases which recurred most frequently on the Harnett ballots were "perfect imitation," "painstaking correctness" and "so like the real thing." Only five visitors, in naming Old Models as their favorite, mentioned anything like "composition," "imagination" or "the mystery created by the

painting of a closed closet door." One Harnett admirer went so far as to write that he liked the picture best because the artist "does not inflict his personal idiosyncracies on me."<sup>100</sup>

Swenson was concerned to add that "it is more than likely that many Highbrows and Upper Middlebrows who saw the show during the voting did not choose to cast ballots." It is interesting to note her ill-concealed disappointment that so few members of the voting public had mentioned qualities such as "'composition,' 'imagination' or 'the mystery created by the painting of a closed closet door'"--expressions that reflected the more up-to-date aesthetical view of Harnett's paintings which was popular in art criticism of the late 1930s and 1940s (as we saw in Chapter 2). So it is also not surprising that when Frankenstein discussed the results of the poll, he took the opportunity to reveal that his "hat was off to the gentleman who admired Harnett because Harnett does not inflict his personal idiosyncracies on his beholder." While nominally tolerant--at least here--of the idea that Harnett's paintings might "tell a story" in a "simple and overt" form, Frankenstein remained skeptical about reading them "in terms of subconscious revelation."<sup>101</sup>

To be sure, Old Models is an impressive example of Harnett's technical skill which, like so many others, yields readily to phrases like "painstaking correctness" or "so like the real thing." Take, for example, this description of Old Models by Louisa Trumbull Cogswell, published just over a month after Harnett's death in 1892:

It represents a piece of sheet music and a cornet hung on a cupboard door, while on the shelf below are ranged a violin, some books and a blue and gray Flemish mug with pewter lid. The cracks and nail-holes in the wood-work, the rusty lock and hinges, the dull brass of the cornet touched with verdigris are positively

startling in their verisimilitude; one can almost turn the leaves of the music, or brush off the dust that has collected under the violin bridge.

She then closed her discussion of Harnett with a straightforward critical judgment:

"One has only to compare this tour de force with the slightest sketch of Hokusai's . . . to recognize . . . [that] Phenomenally clever as Mr. Harnett was, he copied only the external form, the body, of his subject; the Japanese artist portrayed the soul."<sup>102</sup>

Despite this damaging appraisal, one may be tempted to share with the voter in the Corcoran Gallery's poll the sense of "the mystery created by the . . . closed closet door" in Old Models, although it would be misplaced to attribute this quality, consciously or unconsciously, to Harnett's prescient grasp of Surrealist aesthetics. But one of the striking things about Harnett's paintings, quite apart from this sort of puzzling mystery, is how often they harbor features that stand out as unlikely or unnatural, and which one would not expect to encounter in reality. An obvious instance of Harnett subverting the sense of reality which otherwise dominated the critical reception of his work is the alpenstock that is suspended in mid-air--without any visible means of support--in his huge 1885 version of After the Hunt (Fig. 6). From a different perspective, Harnett's miniaturistic still lifes, as we noted earlier, were rendered with a sense of verisimilitude that their reduced scale inclined altogether to counteract. However, a less likely candidate for this sort of consideration is the Dutch jar in Old Models, displayed at a three-quarter angle and shown, like the bust of Shakespeare in Bard of Avon (Fig. 28) and the figure of Bacchus in The Old Cupboard Door, atop books. It is curious and odd to find an object such as a delftware jar with texts underfoot, for it presents deliberate problems

to the "reader" as regards access to the books. And yet, in addition to Old Models, the anomalous presence of a Dutch jar on top of books was fairly common in paintings by Harnett. With slight variations of pictorial design, it appeared in 1884 in two unlocated pictures, George Fryer's Still Life and Still Life with Dutch Jar and Bust of Dante, and in 1888 in his Cincinnati Enquirer (White House Collection, Washington, D.C.), My Gems (Fig. 14) and Still Life (Fig. 41), which is probably the work commissioned by James T. Abbe's partner, George Noble Tyner.<sup>103</sup> What, then, if anything, is the significance of this oft-repeated device, and how does it function in Old Models?

In response one could argue that this delphic arrangement was nothing more than a formal device that augments the vertical thrust of the planks and frame, and conjoined with the shelf helps establish a tension between vertical and horizontal elements. But in addition to this, we are presented with an arrangement in which the Dutch jar appears remarkably, almost anthropomorphically, self-conscious, as Harnett traced its ample white shape against the dark green wood of the cupboard door. Although the edge of the jar's circular base projects just slightly over the edge of the book immediately below it, there is nothing casual or accidental about its placement. We may observe that when Harnett placed a jar, or anything else for that matter, on top of books he was not bound by the norms of everyday experience. It is evident that the contrived deployment of the Dutch jar and books is part of an artistic arrangement; it is a way of declaring the painting to be an act of the imagination, an artful invention, rather than a restatement of conventional reality. For all their

sculpted form, these motifs exist in an unusual, even precarious, relationship that would seem to undermine the possibility that they were meant simply to "produce an effect of reality," as Cogswell would have it.

The apparent peculiarity of this situation needs to be examined more closely. To begin with, the burden of the jar's heft rests on the Odyssey and Shakespeare's Tragedies, which also support, leaning toward the left, an old vellum-bound volume dated 1507 and inscribed with the names "BRVELIS/PASCHAL" (the letter "V" taking the place of the letter "U") (Fig. 42). There is once again an ordered deployment of the two recumbent texts in parallel planes that reaffirm the horizontality of the cupboard shelf. At the same time these two books, along with the base of the Dutch jar, are mounted in a cantilevered arrangement that shifts forward in a graduated series of steps, beyond the edge of the shelf itself. While these steps, if they could in fact be measured, would describe mere fractions of an inch, one could not but be aware of the sheet music underneath the prone books, which seems to extend out beyond the limits of the canvas. It is "'Tis the Last Rose of Summer," a sheet of music which appeared in Music (Manoogian Collection) and, fittingly, in The Last Rose of Summer (Cincinnati Art Museum), both of 1886, and which reappeared in The Old Cupboard Door three years later.

In the song's text we are asked to consider the irreducible loneliness of those who remain behind in the wake of death:

'Tis the last rose of summer  
Left blooming alone;  
All her lovely companions  
Are faded and gone;

No flower of her kindred,  
 No rosebud is nigh,  
 To reflect back her blushes,  
 Or give sigh for sigh.

I'll not leave thee, thou lone one,  
 To pine on the stem;  
 Since the lovely are sleeping,  
 Go, sleep thou with them.  
 Thus kindly I scatter  
 Thy leaves o'er the bed,  
 Where thy mates of the garden  
 Lie scentless and dead.

So soon may I follow,  
 When friendships decay,  
 And from Love's shining circle  
 The gems drop away.  
 When true hearts lie wither'd,  
 And fond ones are flown,  
 Oh! who would inhabit  
 This bleak world alone?<sup>104</sup>

In the first two stanzas of text we are invited to contemplate a rose which now stands alone, and to consider the effect of this isolation upon the flower; then, in the third stanza, the speaker, concerned that the rose can no longer enjoy the comfort of its floral companions, mercifully participates in the death of the flower; and finally, in the fourth stanza, the speaker urges us to meditate upon love and loss, and the idea of a welcome departure from a world in which a life bereft is a fate worse than death.

Clearly, "Tis the Last Rose of Summer" is mournfully gloomy in character. And while the lyrics of the song are not stated but merely implied in Old Models, Harnett presented the sheet of music in such a way that it not only projects very effectively toward the viewer, but literally underlies the arrangement of the three books and Dutch jar. The possibility should therefore be considered that the dramatic

weight of this group may be underscored by Moore's elegiac strain. Of course, it is possible that "'Tis the Last Rose of Summer" presented itself to Harnett because, as Frankenstein was inclined to believe, "when Harnett wished to paint a sheet of music he selected one at random from the stack he had on hand, . . ." <sup>105</sup> But another reason for the artist's choice of this song suggests itself. By the end of 1888 Harnett seemed to be ill more often than well, and his artistic production was in decline. Indeed, one can imagine that in these last years the physical and emotional agonies of Harnett's declining health, his failed attempts to attain relief from his ailments, not to mention a cure, were made the more unbearable by the death of his mother, Honora, in September 1891. <sup>106</sup>

In considering the possibility of a connection between these circumstantial events and the mortuary overtones of "'Tis the Last Rose of Summer," it is worth noting that by reading the last line of the sheet music one is not only led to the violin on which the tune could be played but toward the book inscribed with the following: BRVELIS/PASCHAL/Spiri[. . .]/Of[?] D B[. . .]/ [?]3ii/Roma/1507. We should also note that the final measure of Moore's dirge is brushed by the cast shadow of this vellum-bound text. The significance of this interplay seems to lie at least in part in the first name on the spine, "Bruelis," which was probably derived from the author of a late sixteenth-century medical text by the name of Gualtherus Bruele or, in Anglicized form, Walter Brael. Although we are given the date 1507, the text was not to appear until 1579. Between 1579 and 1647, at least ten editions of Bruele's Praxis Medicinae Theorica et Empirica were printed. A copy of the 1647 edition is

listed among Harnett's possessions in the Birch catalogue.<sup>107</sup> Perhaps Harnett inscribed the binding with the retroactive date 1507, which is also found on a copy of Dante's Divine Comedy in Harnett's Still Life of 1885 (Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center, Los Angeles), to emphasize the volume's great age or a general sense of the past. Or, perhaps, as Judy L. Larson has argued with regard to the vellum-bound volume of Shakespeare's works in Music, the date was chosen because it is rich with a particular but hidden symbolic meaning,<sup>108</sup> which in this case has yet to be determined. Since Harnett claimed in the New York News interview that some of his "models are only suggestions," it should not come as a surprise to find that in Old Models he took liberties with the lettering on the spine. And while the date is still an enigma, it is worth returning to this text in the hope that it may lead us to some general considerations of Harnett's intentions.

To the degree that the first name on the book probably refers, sub rosa, to Bruele's Praxis Medicinæ et Theorica Empirica, the name "Bruelis," with its associations of diagnosis and therapy, may be read as a guarded revelation of those clinical experiences late in Harnett's life. However, the true nature of the source was rendered inconspicuous by being slightly altered. As it is presented, the title of the book makes no claim of medical theory or advances. Nor is there reason to suppose that this old text with its reference to "Bruelis" might contain an account of curative measures or represent a form of medical triumph over disease. Despite Harnett's journeys to the spas of Karlsbad, Germany, and Hot Springs, Arkansas, and his frequent hospital stays in New York--or perhaps because of them--the stripped-down

allusion to Gualtherus Bruele's book may have represented for the artist the diminishing significance of medical efforts. Harnett may have been nervously aware that, as far as his condition was concerned, current medical efforts were no better than those of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But whether or not the introduction of the name "Bruelis" indicates Harnett's personal and private skepticism about medical knowledge and practice, it can be argued that his conception of hope, as it appears in his later works, was fixed on spiritual solutions, not human ones. In Old Models Harnett seems to return to this metaphysical subject, which is raised, perhaps, in the juxtaposition of the nouns "Bruelis" and "Paschal."

The name "Bruelis" materializes immediately above the name "Paschal," with each letter cushioned by the resulting symmetry. "Paschal," which is in the supporting role, refers to Petri Paschalis, the printer responsible for the 1647 edition of Bruele's text. The question arises, Why did Harnett, who emended the lettering on the spine in other ways, choose to either retain or include this negligible information? Of course, including "Paschal" on the spine may have been Harnett's way of acknowledging the text of his model. But Harnett's admission that his "models are only suggestions" cautions us against invoking the Mount Everest challenge, "because it's there." It is worth considering the idea that "Paschal" may have provided Harnett with an opportunity to hint at the conceptual cornerstone of his painting--an awareness of death and the possibility of resurrection.

One wonders, then, if the name "Paschal" would not only serve to allude to Petri Paschalis but allow us to invoke Saint Paschal (also known as Pope Paschal

D). Saint Paschal was a ninth-century pope whose shady reputation had little effect on his special relationship with Saint Cecilia, the patron saint of music, who came to him in a dream.<sup>109</sup> Following his epiphanic experience, Saint Paschal was able to locate the prized remains of Saint Cecilia, which were believed to have been lost to the Lombards in the middle of the eighth century, and have them reburied in the church of Saint Cecilia in Trastevere.<sup>110</sup> It is worth noting that a central place in Harnett's picture has been given to music, which (at least according to a tradition that can be traced back to the beginning of the sixteenth century) so much occupied Saint Cecilia. (Also, like Saint Paschal's quest for the body of Saint Cecilia, it may prove difficult if not impossible for us to place the first tune in the sheet of music, "50 M[elod]ies pour Violon," from the fragment just visible beneath its torn cover without some form of divine guidance.) However, if "Paschal" has led the reader to imagine a thing rather than a person, it could serve as an allusion to the paschal festival of Easter, which celebrates the resurrection of Christ. It should be pointed out that the name "Paschal" is inscribed on a vellum-bound text, and that both "paschal" and vellum have associations with the lamb: We are prompted to remember that vellum is made from lamb, kid, or calfskin, and that "paschal" can refer to the paschal lamb or to Christ, the Lamb of God. Thus, if the notion of hope figures in this book, it would seem to be bound rather more closely to the allusive noun "Paschal" than to the restorative claims which can be associated with the name "Bruegelis."

It is not unreasonable to suppose that "Paschal" puts the book into a spiritual perspective, for that is what the remnants of the third word on the spine,

"Spiri[. . .]," seem to declare. In this light, one notes that the religious associations of the word "Paschal" are made the more poignant because they introduce into the text an edgy sense of expectancy and woe as opposed to ultimate fulfillment: Having sprung from the death and skinning of a lamb, we are free to notice that the vellum binding may also allude to the suffering of Christ on the cross. As mentioned above, the word "Paschal" can be linked to Easter, the day which not only marks the resurrection but, significantly enough, precedes by forty days the immediate occasion of Christ's ascension into heaven. The theme of transition, the passage from one state to another, is maintained in the stance of the text itself, insofar as it occupies an intermediate position between the reclining books and the violin, neither standing upright nor lying down. It would seem possible, then, that Harnett's juxtaposing of the nouns "Bruelis" and "Paschal" is thematically provocative. We all know, as Harnett himself evidently knew only too well, that medical theory and practice is often not enough to overcome pain. And, in any case, medicine is ultimately eclipsed by death. As such "Bruelis" and "Paschal" appear to force up the tension between physical disease, on the one hand, and spiritual health, on the other--both of which, when Christ is cast in the role of the sacrificial Lamb, can be seen as involving the torment of pain and grief.

Still, our conception of death is considerably more various than our general acceptance of it would suggest, and the same could be said for Harnett's presentation of mortality in Old Models. What he seems to be doing here, not only with the old vellum text but with its textual companions--the Odyssey and Shakespeare's

Tragedies--is furnishing the painting with discrete references to death and after-death experiences. Over a decade earlier, we may recall, Harnett had introduced a copy of Shakespeare's Works in his painting To This Favor--A Thought from Shakespeare and a copy of Shakespeare Tragedies in Memento Mori--"To This Favour". In both cases the books appeared in conjunction with the deeply provocative, hand-written warning from Hamlet (Act 5, Scene 1): "Now get you to my lady's chamber, and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favor she must come." Although in the painting under consideration Harnett does not make it quite so easy for the viewer to correlate Hamlet with Shakespeare's Tragedies, it is almost as if he was calling upon The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark once again. Indeed, suspicion is aroused that Hamlet may have been playing in the back of Harnett's mind, especially since Hamlet was approached by the ghost of his dead father.<sup>111</sup> Such a hidden allusion would coincide, in a general sense, with what might be the buried reference in the title Bruegel/Paschal to Saint Paschal, who, as mentioned before, was visited, albeit in his sleep, by a manifestation of the long-dead Saint Cecilia.

Because of the dearth of tangible evidence here it is necessary to refrain from straightforwardly crediting Harnett with this sort of metonymical sleight of hand. The name "Paschal" alone is not sufficient to conjure visions of Saint Cecilia; and, by the same token, the title Shakespeare's Tragedies is helpful, but not sufficient, to call up the ghost of Hamlet's father. But Harnett may have provided a crucial link in the evidence that would allow us to sustain this argument: he chose to exhibit in conjunction with those two books a copy of Homer's Odyssey. It is hard to

believe that the famous passage in which Odysseus encounters the shades of the dead would escape Harnett's notice. In light of the way the vellum-bound volume inclines against the Odyssey, it is appropriate to consider that Odysseus's call to the dead begins with a pious ritual that requires the sacrifice if not of a single and sanctified lamb, as perhaps implied in Bruegel/Paschal, then of sheep, lambs grown old: "Now when, with sacrifices and prayers, I had so entreated the hordes of the dead, I took the sheep and cut their throats over the pit . . . ." Almost immediately,

. . . the souls  
of the perished dead gathered to the place, up out of Erebos,  
brides, and young unmarried men, and long-suffering elders, virgins, tender and  
with the sorrows of young hearts upon them,  
and many fighting men killed in battle, stabbed with brazen spears, still carrying  
their bloody armor upon them.<sup>112</sup>

If we are correct in supposing that Harnett made use of the Odyssey because it contains a dramatic presentation of the state of life after death, then perhaps it does more than simply complicate the demography of the afterworld. For, if we are allowed to correlate Hamlet with Shakespeare Tragedies (as Harnett himself did on the occasion of Memento Mori--"To This Favour") then the Odyssey would seem to follow in natural sequence. In both Hamlet and the Odyssey we are not only presented with situations in which the dead reappear but, more specifically, in which a dead parent reappears to a son. Just as Hamlet meets the ghost of his father, Odysseus ventures to the land of the dead where he comes face to face with the soul of his deceased mother. It is difficult to imagine that Harnett, in poor health and in the wake of his own mother's death, would be unaffected by the following:

' . . . she spoke, but I, pondering it in my heart, yet wished

to take the soul of my dead mother in my arms. Three times I started toward her, and my heart was urgent to hold her, and three times she fluttered out of my hands like a shadow or a dream, and the sorrow sharpened at the heart within me, and so I spoke to her and addressed her in winged words, saying:

"Mother, why will you not wait for me, when I am trying to hold you, so that even in Hades' with our arms embracing we can both take the satisfaction of dismal mourning? Or are you nothing but an image that proud Persephone sent my way, to make me grieve all the more for sorrow?"

'So I spoke, and my queenly mother answered me quickly:  
"Oh my child, ill-fated beyond all other mortals, this is not Persephone, daughter of Zeus, beguiling you, but it is only what happens, when they die, to all mortals. The sinews no longer hold the flesh and the bones together, and once the spirit has left the white bones, all the rest of the body is made subject to the fire's strong fury, but the soul flutters out like a dream and flies away."<sup>113</sup>

From the Odyssey with its shadowy encounters with the dead we move to the next level, at which stands the Dutch jar. If we accept the idea that in various ways the dead operate in each of the texts on the cupboard shelf, and that the books mark strata in which women and men have been buried, then the jar, with a sort of pacific Dutch landscape on its side, could be directing us to a delicate division between life and death, and, perhaps, between heaven and earth. The amplitude of the jar stark against a field of dark green lends a measure of gravity to this section of Harnett's composition, which is intensified by the downward thrust of the escutcheon immediately above it. The three-dimensional volume of the jar, contrasted with the flat planks of the cupboard door, sits heavily upon the prostrate books. Its simple, cozy patterns of windmill and trees present us with an idyllic image of the world. But at the same time it is a shadowless world, an insubstantial world explored in flat hues of blue on white; and we are invited to contemplate nature as reducible and

fragile like the jar itself, which has a carefully indicated crack near its lid. Without air or sunlight, the muted tones of this sterile landscape might seem to be in the process of fading away.

It would seem fitting that this dark and ghostly vision of nature should be echoed in the violin at the right. As Cogswell observed in Arcadia in 1892, its verisimilitude is such that "one can almost . . . brush off the dust that has collected under the violin-bridge."<sup>14</sup> And appearing, as the dust does, along the horizontal level established by the ground line of the Dutch landscape as well as on the body of the violin, it might seem to amplify the notion that, as the Scripture puts it, "we are dust." Indeed, the sympathetic vibration between the jar and violin is underlined by their undulate contours, complementary silhouettes which moderate the gulf between them. In both cases, however, the association of the ground plane with worldly pursuits and death is superceded by sharp diagonal movements toward the upper right.

The violin, in a posture of repose which contrasts with the upright attitude of the Dutch jar, leans on a nail just shy of the right jamb. As opposed to the horizontal bands on the jar which seem to compress action downward, and to the languorous curves of the violin, the strings of the instrument run swiftly upward, converging at the pegbox. This upward movement is then carried over into the funneling lines of the violin's scroll. A second diagonal thrust is exercised through the bow. Taking off from a position just behind the jar and, significantly enough, from an angle adjacent to the ground level of the Dutch landscape, the bow inclines directly against the inside of the door frame itself, which emerges gradually from

shadow. The point at which the end of the bow touches the frame, we recognize quickly, is a confluence of various planes which can be read as a series of closely spaced parallel lines that scale the steep plank of the cupboard door. We are led to the upper right corner where the arrow-like tip of the rusty hinge and the open chip of splintered board, like the triangle-shaped tear in the sheet music below, direct attention to the horn. We arrive at this point, then, by a process of ascendance that refers back to the motions of The Old Cupboard Door, moving from the earthly region of death associated with the objects on the cupboard shelf to the upper reaches of the door. The artist invites us to raise our eyes above the level of the mutable world as reflected in the Dutch landscape to behold the muted splendor of the horn.

It might seem ungenerous to note that this instrument—a keyed bugle—was identified by Cogswell, as well as in the Birch catalogue the following year, as a cornet.<sup>115</sup> But in all fairness, it might be easy for the layman to confuse these wind instruments, especially since the keyed bugle has valves like the cornet, not to mention the trumpet. Identification was the more difficult because, while the keyed bugle was popular in both America and Europe in the early nineteenth century, the heyday of the instrument was over by the 1860s.<sup>116</sup> And yet, to identify the brass horn in this painting by species rather than genus may be to misconstrue its relevance. Harnett presents to us a horn, a class of wind instrument that could be traced back, easily, to antiquity, and it seems possible that he was playing metaphorically with the idea of a trumpet. The keyed bugle in fact has the distinction of being classified as a trumpet.<sup>117</sup> It seems reasonable to suppose that in an iconographic program which

seems to provide multiple allusions to life beyond death, an allusion might be intended to the trumpet, an instrument which bears a family resemblance to the keyed bugle, and which could be heard resounding not only in Harnett's time but in the Bible.

With its mouthpiece poised heavenward, the luminous horn may be charged with a desirable though discrete hermeneutic significance. Harnett may be calling here upon several Christian scriptural passages in which the sound of the trumpet accompanies the Resurrection. According to Matthew:

And he will send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When its branch is yet tender and putteth forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So likewise you, when you see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors!<sup>118</sup>

Also, in I Thessalonians:

For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. . . . For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.<sup>119</sup>

And, as recorded in I Corinthians:

Lo! I will tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality.<sup>120</sup>

Although the horn in Old Models is, at this point, mute, the sound of the trumpet is connected in Matthew with the parable of the fig tree which describes signs that anticipate the new season, and it is a sound which acts as an outward sign that

resurrection is near at hand. We may be reminded that it is fixed against the cupboard door, and that on the shelf below, extending expectantly toward the viewer, is the mortuary, doleful strain of "'Tis the Last Rose of Summer." Since in the course of the seasons we move from springtime hope to the chilling end of summer, we are prompted to recognize that when death "is near, even at the doors!" resurrection cannot be far behind.

Thus if Harnett is dealing in Old Models with the intertwining of death and resurrection, as he appeared to be doing in The Old Cupboard Door, it seems he is proceeding with a steadfast confidence in Christian theology. Executed in the midst of personal mourning and Harnett's worsening health, death is of course the first figure in the painting. But despite the picture's air of finality, it would seem that he was never more alive to the notion of the ultimate spiritual release to be achieved after death. And if, like the commentator of I Corinthians, Harnett is telling us a mystery, it is not so much "the mystery created by the painting of a closed closet door," as that intrepid visitor to the Corcoran Gallery described it. For the clues to this mystery, though they are understandably private and admittedly oblique, appear before us with an immediacy that is difficult to overlook.

Harnett met his death on 29 October 1892. His painting of Old Models, then, stands at the very end of his career and life, and it seems evident that Harnett's speculations on life and death had strayed far from the conventional depiction of vanitas found in his early works. We know that one of his earliest interests as an artist was in the theme of vanitas, and that he painted at least three pictures with the

death's head. It is the contention of this dissertation that Harnett absorbed this theme in his bones. The idea of the hard inescapable relationship between life and death, a fact of mortal existence which could be softened with hopeful calls to the afterlife, was carried forward and modified by Harnett in many and unusual ways. To be sure, he exhibited a remarkable tendency to scrutinize closely the real world in its physical and transient aspects, an approach which exacted a price. Harnett's paintings have over the years resisted easy assimilation into the realms of allegorical and symbolic imagery. However, despite his immense technical mastery, his exacting demands on himself as a painter who traffics in illusionism, we have seen that he was concerned to create more than realistic effects. And while it is perhaps impossible to prove the point, there seems to be ample evidence in his oeuvre that Harnett, with a keen sense of both formal and metaphoric structure, was richly aware of the ideas one finds buried in his work.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>[Clarence Cook], "The National Academy of Design; The Autumn Exhibition." Studio, n.s. no. 7 (8 November 1884), 81.

For discussions of Henry Alexander (1859-1894), see Frankenstein, After the Hunt, 145-46; and Raymond L. Wilson, "Henry Alexander: Chronicler of Commerce," Archives of American Art Journal 20, no. 2 (1980), 10-13.

<sup>2</sup>It is interesting to note that in 1883 both Harnett and Cook were in Munich, where the painter exhibited a Still Life at the Internationale Kunstausstellung at the Munich Glaspalast and the critic reviewed the exhibition. Cook did not, however, mention Harnett or his work; see Clarence Cook, "The Munich Exhibition; Second Notice," Art Amateur 9, no. 6 (November 1883), 119, 122. Also, there is no mention of Harnett's contribution in B. M., "The Munich Exhibition; First Notice." Art Amateur 9, no. 5 (October 1883), 92-93.

<sup>3</sup>This point is raised in William H. Gerdts, Painters of the Humble Truth, 159.

<sup>4</sup>See Catalogue of the Paintings in the Old Pinakothek, Munich, intro. Franz von Reber, trans. Joseph Thacher Clarke (Munich: Knorr & Hirth, 1885), 132, no. 629.

<sup>5</sup>See Gerdts, *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup>"Fine Arts; National Academy of Design; Special Autumn Exhibition," New-York Daily Tribune 21 October 1882, 5.

<sup>8</sup>The present whereabouts of the postcard is unknown, but it continues to exist in the form of photocopies. I should like to acknowledge a special debt of gratitude to Thayer Tolles Mickel, Assistant Curator, Departments of American Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, who not only provided me with much kind help, but afforded me the opportunity to consult the chronology she was in the process of preparing for the exhibition, William M. Harnett.

<sup>9</sup>"Painted Like Real Things," *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup>Harnett was listed with a London address in 1885; see Algernon Graves, The Royal Academy of Arts; A Complete Dictionary of Contributors and their work from its foundation in 1769 to 1904, vol. 3 (London: Henry Graves and Co.; George Bell and Sons, 1905), 395.

<sup>12</sup>See "Jeems Pipes' Pipings; From My Attic Room," American Art Journal 44, no. 14 (January 23, 1886), 231. It is not out of order to wonder about the author's reliability, for in the same article he proceeded to make the doubtful claim that "a prominent millionaire of this city has offered \$15,000 for a copy [of After the Hunt]."

<sup>13</sup>See "Art's Counterfeiting," New York Star 30 December 1885, 6.

<sup>14</sup>"Painted Like the Real Things," *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup>Beate I. Hirsch has located this information in the "Matrikel Buch," *Academie fur Bildende Kunst*, Munich, 1841-1884, (October 18, 1881) no. 4037; see Hirsch's "Summary of findings of William Harnett," 1. I am grateful for access to Ms Hirsch's report, which is in The Metropolitan Museum of Art research files.

<sup>16</sup>Hirsch notes that Harnett was listed in the Annual Reports of the Kunstverein, Munich, in 1881, 1882, 1883, and 1884; see Hirsch, *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup>"An Interesting Letter," Sketch Book 1, no. 7 (July 1883), 76-77.

<sup>18</sup>"News from the Kunstverein," Munchner Neueste Nachrichten und Munchen Anzeiger, August 1882, from a clipping in the Blemly Scrapbook, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., trans. Alfred Frankenstein in After the Hunt, 62, n. 34.

<sup>19</sup>See Ingvar Bergström, Dutch Still-Life Painting in the Seventeenth Century, trans. Christina Hedström and Gerald Taylor (New York: Thomas Yoselhoff, 1956), 156.

<sup>20</sup>F[rederick] Edward Hulme, Bards and Blossoms, or The Poetry, History, and Associations of Flowers (London: Marcus Ward & Co., 1877), 153.

<sup>21</sup>Edward Hitchcock, Religious Lectures on Peculiar Phenomena in the Four Seasons: I. The Resurrection of Spring: II. The Triumphal Arch of Sunrise: III. The Euthanasia of Autumn: IV. The Coronation of Winter: Delivered to the Students in Amhearst College in 1845, 1847, 1848 and 1849 (Amhearst: J. S. & C. Adams, 1850), 30.

<sup>22</sup>M. S. Lantz, The Acme Cyclopedia and Dictionary: A Practical Compendium of Useful Information and Book of References for Everybody (Philadelphia: Globe

Publishing Co., 1884), 82.

<sup>23</sup>Hans Christian Andersen, Fairy Tales and Stories, trans. H. W. Dulcken (London and New York: George Routledge and Sons, 189[?]), 102; and "Of Bronze and Blaze" (290) in The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson, ed. by Thomas H. Johnson (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1961), 135.

<sup>24</sup>Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, Adventures of Don Quixote de la Mancha, trans. Charles Jarvis (New York: John Wurtele Lovell, Publisher, 1880), book 4, chap. 53, 691.

Harnett painted a copy of Cervantes's famous novel in Music and Literature, but, interestingly enough, did not refer to a specific section of the book as he did in A Study Table.

<sup>25</sup>George Ferguson, Signs & Symbols in Christian Art (London, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 30.

The daisy and its symbolism of the infant Christ's innocence is to be encountered in Wilhelm von Schadow's The Artist's Children (1830; Kunstmuseum, Düsseldorf); see German Masters of the Nineteenth Century (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1981), 194, no. 75.

<sup>26</sup>Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, The Poetical Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co.; Cambridge, Mass.: Riverside Press, 1891), 3.

<sup>27</sup>Executrix's Sale Catalogue, 7, no. 29.

<sup>28</sup>For example, armor is included in Harnett's Still Life with Bust of Dante (1883; High Museum of Art, Atlanta), Still Life with Bust of Dante (1883; Morton Fungier Collection, Washington, D.C.), and George Fryer's Still Life (1884), and is combined with flowers in Music (1886; Manoogian Collection, Taylor, Mich.) and Still Life (1887; Mr. and Mrs. Meyer Potamkin, Philadelphia).

<sup>29</sup>"A Fine Still-Life Painting," Springfield Daily Republican 7 November 1887, 6.

<sup>30</sup>The Holyoke Envelope Company was located on Cabot Street until the building was destroyed by a fire in January 1888. The new site of the company was on Main Street in Holyoke; see "Envelopes by the Million; The Holyoke Envelope Company's New Building," Paper World 16, no. 4 (April 1888), 1-2; see also Biographical Review; This Volume Contains biographical sketches of the Leading Citizens of Hampden County Massachusetts (Boston: Biographical Review Publishing Co., 1895), 55.

<sup>31</sup>A nineteenth-century photograph of Ease which shows smoke rising from the cigar is reproduced in William M. Harnett, 34.

<sup>32</sup>The question of a social and political motive in Ease was first taken up by Judy L. Larson, see "Literary References in Harnett's Still-Life Paintings" in William M. Harnett, 272-73.

<sup>33</sup>It seems probable, as Frankenstein suspected, that the damage to Ease was caused by the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire. Although the January 1888 fire devastated the Holyoke Envelope Company, reports indicate that the painting emerged unscathed; see "A Mill Burned at Holyoke; The Envelope Company's Plant Entirely Wiped Out--The Loss About \$325,000--Machinist Perkins Suffers Heavily--Nearly 300 Hands Thrown Out of Work," Springfield Daily Republican 23 January 1888, 5; and "Holyoke Envelope Company Burned Out," Paper World 16, no. 2 (February 1888), 17.

In light of the manner in which his factory was destroyed, it is interesting to note that after Abbe had sold Ease to Collis P. Huntington in the summer or fall of 1888, he quickly moved to replace Harnett's picture with a trompe l'oeil painting by John Haberle--Grandma's Hearthstone--a work which features a raging fire in a fireplace; see "Envelopes and Envelope-Making; Wonderful Business Growth Produced by Well-Directed Enterprise and Energy; The Holyoke Envelope Company's New Plant," Paper World 17, no. 5 (November 1888), 4.

<sup>34</sup>I should like to thank Oscar Fikar, Adjunct Assistant Professor of Art History at the Fashion Institute of Technology, for identifying this motif for me.

<sup>35</sup>The phrase "wine and other exciting causes" is used in Clara Erskine Clement's A Handbook of Mythological and Legendary Art (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1881), 431, to account for the frenzy of the female attendants at the Bacchic festivals.

<sup>36</sup>For an overview of oinochoai, see Gisela M. A. Richter and Marjorie J. Milne, Shapes and Names of Athenian Vases (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1935), 18-19.

<sup>37</sup>Gerds, American Neo-Classic Sculpture; The Marble Resurrection (New York: Viking Press, 1973), 54. For a similar characterization, see Linda Hyman, "The Greek Slave by Hiram Powers: High Art as Popular Art," Art Journal 35, no. 3 (Spring 1976), 219.

<sup>38</sup>For a contemporary account of the Dionysia and Anthesteria, see F. Warre Cornish, A Concise Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1898), 236.

<sup>39</sup>William Smith, ed., A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities, (London: Printed for Taylor and Walton, 1842), 342.

<sup>40</sup>See, for example, John Potter, Archeologia Graeca, or the Antiquities of Greece, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Printed for Stirling & Slade; and for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, & Brown; J. Nunn; Baldwin, Craddock & Jay, 1820), 425-26; Charles Anthon, A Manual of Grecian Antiquities (New York: Harper & Bros., 1852), 243-44; Charles Anthon, Classical Dictionary: containing an account of the Principal Proper Names mentioned in Ancient Authors, and intended to elucidate all the important points connected with the geography, history, biography, mythology, and fine arts of the Greeks and Romans (New-York: Published by Harper & Bros., 1843), 140. Anthon's accounts formed the basis for Cornish's discussion of Bacchic rites in Concise Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities, 235-36.

<sup>41</sup>I should like to thank Michael Volonakis for his translations of the ancient Greek texts found in aforementioned dictionaries of Charles Anthon, F. Warre Cornish, and William Smith.

<sup>42</sup>See Anthon, Manual of Grecian Antiquities, 244; see also Smith, ed., Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities, 342.

<sup>43</sup>See G. Van Hoon, Choes and Anthesteria (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1951), 15.

<sup>44</sup>This rite is referred to as "a feast of the dead" in Cornish, Concise Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities, 1898, 236.

<sup>45</sup>See National Party Platforms, 1840-1964, comp. Donald Bruce Johnson and Kirk H. Porter (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1966), 46, 53, 60-61, 73, 79-80.

<sup>46</sup>Encyclopedia of Massachusetts: Biographical-Genealogical, vol. 12 (New York, Chicago: American Historical Society, 1916), 132.

<sup>47</sup>William Cullen Bryant and Sydney Howard Gay, A Popular History of the United States, vol. 1 (New York: Scribner's, Armstrong, and Co., 1876), ix.

<sup>48</sup>William Cullen Bryant, Poetical Works of William Cullen Bryant (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1892), 316.

<sup>49</sup>John Greenleaf Whittier, The Complete Poetical Works of John Greenleaf Whittier (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co.; Cambridge, Mass.: Riverside Press, 1892), 62-63.

<sup>50</sup>Wilmerding, Important Information Inside, 198-99.

<sup>51</sup>See Wilmerding, "Images of Lincoln in Peto's Late Paintings," Archives of American Art Journal 22, no. 2 (1982), 3-12.

<sup>52</sup>Reprinted in Frankenstein, After the Hunt, 86.

<sup>53</sup>As mentioned in Chapter 3, Harnett presented a photograph of Job Lot Cheap to his friend Edward Taylor Snow inscribed with the words, "To E. T. Snow, thanks for the idea, Yours Truly, William M. Harnett." See Frankenstein, *ibid.*, 47.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>55</sup>Frankenstein, After the Hunt, 83.

<sup>56</sup>Encyclopedia of Massachusetts, vol. 12, 132.

<sup>57</sup>Harnett's Ease is listed in the Catalogue of the Paintings in the Art Gallery of the Cincinnati Centennial Exposition--1888 (Cincinnati, 4 July-27 October, 1888), 23, no. 74, as "Loaned by James T. Abbe, Holyoke, Mass." and as "FOR SALE." That it was sold sometime during the course of the Cincinnati Centennial Exposition of the Ohio Valley and Central States is confirmed in "Envelopes and Envelope-Making," 4.

<sup>58</sup>See "Envelopes and Envelope-Making," *ibid.*; see also Jane Marlin, "John Haberle, A Remarkable Contemporaneous Painter in Detail," Illustrated American 24, no. 463 (December 30, 1898), 516-17.

<sup>59</sup>Mark 4:9-11.

<sup>60</sup>The vase would seem to consort well with either one of two references in the Birch catalogue: "129 Byzantine Vase / Hammered brass. Very rare and old. Representing five religious subjects in high relief" or "130 Byzantine Vase / Modern facsimile of lot 129." See Executrix's Sale Catalogue, 15.

The vase has recently been identified by Charles T. Little, Associate Curator, Department of Medieval Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, as a nineteenth-century "file copy in bronze" of "the 10th century ivory Gotfredus situla that is in the Milan Cathedral treasury" (personal communication, Little to Doreen Bolger, 6 February 1991). I am grateful to Dr. Bolger, Curator of Paintings and Sculpture, Amon Carter Museum, for very generously sharing this information with me.

<sup>61</sup>See Lillian B. Lawler, "The Maenads: A Contribution to the Study of Dance in Ancient Greece," Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome 6 (1927), 107.

<sup>62</sup>See G. Woolliscroft Rhead, History of the Fan (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1910), 75.

<sup>63</sup>Interestingly, although more notice was taken of the thyrsus in nineteenth-century studies, a fan known in antiquity as a lichnon was likewise connected to the celebration of the Bacchic rites and the notion of ease; see Rhead, History of the Fan, 11.

<sup>64</sup>Clement, Handbook of Legendary and Mythological Art, 215.

<sup>65</sup>Alban Butler, Lives of the Saints (New York, Cincinnati, Chicago: Benziger Bros., 1894), 157. This book was also printed in 1878, and 1887.

<sup>66</sup>See The Iliad, trans. with an intro. by Richmond Lattimore (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 2:689-90; 20:193; 9:664, 667-68. See also *ibid.*, 18:341.

<sup>67</sup>For example, Thomas De Quincey was concerned to "Suppose . . . that Homer in some of his names, really had borne a designation glancing at symbolical meaning, what of that?" He continued: "Homer has . . . significant or symbolizing senses. It means a hostage; it means a blind man, as much as a cabinet-maker, or even a packer of trunks." See Thomas De Quincey, "Homer and the Homeridae" in Historical and Critical Essays, vol. 1 (Boston: Ticknor, Reed, and Fields, 1853), 262, 264; This speculation is repeated in Thomas De Quincey, Dr. Samuel Parr; or Whiggism in its Relations to Literature (Boston: Shepard and Gill, 1873), 319, 321.

I should like to thank Sarah Cash, Assistant Curator, Amon Carter Museum, who, in response to an inquiry, indicated that pentimenti of the title "ILIAD/HOMER" is visible underneath the title "HOMER'S/ILIAD."

<sup>68</sup>Gilbert Malcolm Sproat, Sir Walter Scott as a Poet (Edinburgh: Edmonston & Douglas, 1871), 36.

<sup>69</sup>Bryant included five selections from the poetry of Scott under the category "War"; the next highest number of selections from a single author was two, a distinction shared by five poets; see William Cullen Bryant, ed., The Family Library of Poetry and Song (New York: Fords, Howard, and Hulbert, 1880), 507 ff.

<sup>70</sup>See Sir Walter Scott, "The Lady of the Lake" in Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott (London: R. Clay, Sons, and Taylor, 1881), Canto Sixth, XII-XXII, 184-188. Interestingly, the "Battle of Beal' an Duine" is followed almost immediately by the "Lay of the Imprisoned Minstrel"; see Scott, "The Lady of the Lake," *ibid.*, XXIV-XXIX, 188-90.

<sup>71</sup>Mark Twain [Samuel Clemens], Life on the Mississippi (Boston: James R. Osgood and Co., 1883), 469.

<sup>72</sup>Bryant, Popular History of the United States, vol. 1, vii-viii.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., xi.

<sup>74</sup>"A Fine Still-Life Painting," *ibid.*

<sup>75</sup>See Lucius M. Boltwood, History of Genealogy of the Family of Thomas Noble of Westfield, Massachusetts (Hartford, Conn.: Press of the Case, Lockwood & Brain Company, 1878), 755, 757. See also Biographical Directory of the Governors of the United States 1789-1978, ed. Robert Sobel and John Raimo (Westport, Conn.: Meckler Books; A Division of Microform Review Inc., 1978), 398.

<sup>76</sup>"A Fine Still-Life Painting."

<sup>77</sup>These references are found under burning, 2.b. in The Oxford English Dictionary, prep. J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 678.

<sup>78</sup>The sheet music in Ease has been identified recently by Marc Simpson: see Simpson, "Harnett and Music," 294.

<sup>79</sup>"Envelopes and Envelope-Making," 1.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid.

<sup>81</sup>In The Artist's Letter Rack painted a blue three-cent stamp commemorating Washington at the left, and an orange-brown two-cent stamp representing Andrew Jackson at the right. In Mr. Huling's Rack Picture one finds the two-cent Washington stamp on the envelopes from William McCarter and C. W. Bickley, and the pre-1883 one-cent stamp with a bust of Benjamin Franklin on both the envelope from William Macpherson and the one behind Bickley's letter.

For a discussion of American stamps of this period, see Maud Petersham and Miska Petersham, America's Stamps: The Story of One Hundred Years of U. S. Postage Stamps (New York: Macmillan Co., 1947), 25, 30.

<sup>82</sup>See Garry Wills, Cincinnatus: George Washington and the Enlightenment (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1984), 96.

<sup>83</sup>See Woollen, Biographical and Historical Sketches of Early Indiana, 67-68.

<sup>84</sup>W[illiam] and J[ames] Audsley, Handbook of Christian Symbolism (London: Day & Son, 1865), 98.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 144; also see F[rederick] Edward Hulme, The History, Principles, and Practice of Symbolism in Christian Art (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1891), 195.

<sup>86</sup>Ferguson, Signs & Symbols in Christian Art, 177.

<sup>87</sup>Van Hoorn, Choes and Anthesteria, 19.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 24.

<sup>89</sup>G. McL., "The Art Gallery of the Centennial," Cincinnati Commercial Gazette 27 October 1888, 7. Commentary on The Old Violin in the Cincinnati Commercial Gazette in 1886 can be found in Frankenstein, After the Hunt, 75-76.

<sup>90</sup>Clement, Handbook of Legendary and Mythological Art, 473.

<sup>91</sup>I am indebted to Walter Sage, Senior Scientific Assistant, American Museum of Natural History, New York, for very kindly identifying this shell for me.

<sup>92</sup>Macbeth, act 5, scene 5, lines 19-28.

<sup>93</sup>Although King's Poor Artist's Cupboard went unmentioned in the catalogue of Bement's collection, published in 1884, it is visible in a photograph of his dining room. See the present author's "William Michael Harnett's The Old Cupboard Door," 56.

<sup>94</sup>For a discussion of the relationship between vanitas and Poor Artist's Cupboard, see Cosentino, "Charles Bird King: An Appreciation," 58-59; Cosentino, Paintings of Charles Bird King, 28; see also Gerdtz and Burke, American Still-Life Painting, 52-53. For a discussion of the relationship between melancholia, vanitas, and King's Poor Artist's Cupboard, see the present author's "Washington Allston's 'The Evening Hymn'," 144.

<sup>95</sup>See Richard Wallace, "Salvator Rosa's Democritus and L'Umana Fragilita," Art Bulletin 50, no. 1 (March 1968), 21-31; and Frederic Cummings, "Folly and Mutability in Two Romantic Paintings, The Alchemist and Democritus by Joseph Wright," Art Digest 33, no. 3 (Autumn 1970), 247-75. The connection between melancholy and vanitas is also seen in popular literature, as in the case of a verse which appeared in European Magazine in May 1806, just prior to King's arrival in London; see C., "Picture of Melancholy," European Magazine 49 (May 1806), 374.

<sup>96</sup>Charles Browne, Symbolism: A Lecture, delivered on behalf of the Stoke Newington and Hackney Church Association, at the Schoolroom of S. Matthias, Stoke Newington (London: Joseph Masters, 1865; first published in 1855), 9-10. Browne's discussion of the relation of Orpheus to Christ was quoted in its entirety in W. Audsley and G. Audsley, Handbook of Christian Symbolism, 36. See also Hulme, History, Principles, and Practise of Symbolism in Christian Art, 42.

<sup>97</sup>See Frankenstein, *ibid.*, 92; and Carol Troyen, catalogue entry on Old Models in A New World: Masterpieces of American Painting 1760-1910, 287.

<sup>98</sup>A painting by Harnett titled The Old Cupboard Door, with measurements that match those of Old Models--28 x 53 inches--is listed in Catalogue of a Collection of Modern Paintings in oil and water color; formed by Mr. A. Ludwig (Fifth Avenue Art Galleries, New York, February 1-2, 1898), 23, no. 93.

<sup>99</sup>"Artist Harnett Dead; The Well-Known Still-Life Painter Dies in Hospital." New-York Times 31 October 1892, 3.

<sup>100</sup>Eleanor B. Swenson, "De Gustibus: A Postscript," Right Angle 2, no. 12 (April 1949), n.p.

<sup>101</sup>Frankenstein, *ibid.*, 95.

<sup>102</sup>Cogswell, "Art in Boston," 306.

<sup>103</sup>The date, dimensions, and description of George N. Tyner's Still Life--"Signed at the left, dated 1888. Height, 13 inches; length 16 1/2 inches"--are remarkably close to those of the Still Life by Harnett in The Metropolitan Museum of Art--"Signed and dated at lower left . . . 1888. . . .14 x 17 1/8 in." It may be tentatively suggested that it was for Tyner that, as inscribed on the back of the canvas, the work was "Painted to order." See, respectively, Illustrated Catalogue of the Private Collection of Valuable Modern Paintings belonging to Mr. George N. Tyner, Holyoke, Massachusetts to be disposed at the American Art Galleries (American Art Association, New York, February 1, 1901), n.p., no. 15; and Doreen Bolger Burke, American Paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, vol. 3, ed. Kathleen Luhrs (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art in association with Princeton University Press, 1985), 54.

<sup>104</sup>Thomas Moore, The Poetical Works of Thomas Moore (New York: Hurst & Co., Publishers, [c. 1883]), 259-60.

<sup>105</sup>Frankenstein, 41.

<sup>106</sup>On 11 December 1888 Harnett was admitted to St. Francis Hospital in New York, suffering from what he described in a letter to his friend W. J. Hughes as "my old complaint" (see the Alfred Frankenstein Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, roll 1375, frames 542-43). According to hospital records, his ailment was diagnosed as acute uremia, and the medical report delineated further that he was afflicted with subacute arthritis, rheumatism, and acute nephritis; see personal communication, Sister Maria (of the St. Francis Home) to Alfred Frankenstein, in Alfred Frankenstein Papers, *ibid.*, frame 520. Harnett succumbed to uremia in the

fall of 1892; see Casebook, First Medical Division, New York Hospital, September-October 1892, 436-37. His mother, Honora ("Hannah") Harnett, died on 11 September 1891. For death notices, see Philadelphia Record 12 September 1891, 5; Evening Item (Philadelphia) 12 September 1891, 4; and Philadelphia Inquirer 13 September 1891, 6.

Hardin argues that the personal tragedy and illness late in Harnett's life had a profound effect on the symbolic meaning of his late works (see Hardin, "The Late Years," 185-89).

<sup>107</sup>Executrix's Sale Catalogue, 24, no. 402.

<sup>108</sup>See Larson, "Literary References in Harnett's Still-Life Paintings," 270.

<sup>109</sup>See Rev. Horace K. Mann, The Lives of the Popes in the early Middle Ages, vol. 2 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co.; St. Louis, Mo.: B. Herder Book Co., 1925), 151-52.

<sup>110</sup>For a description of the church of Saint Cecilia in Trastevere, see Torquato Picarelli, Monography, Historical-Artistical of the Church, Crypt and House of S. Cecilia in Trastevere (Roma: Officina Fotoincisione nell' Instituto S. Michele, 1924).

<sup>111</sup>Hamlet act 3, scene 2.

<sup>112</sup>Odyssey 9:34-41.

Hardin notes that the copy of Homer's Odyssey in Old Models, suggesting in a general way that the text, together with Shakespeare's Tragedies, was "adding an oppressive aura and perhaps alluding to the artist's illness" and that "The Odyssey may hint at the troubles the artist encountered during the last years of his life" (Hardin, "The Last Years," 189).

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., 9:204-22.

<sup>114</sup>Cogswell, 306.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid.; and Executrix's Sale Catalogue, 11, no. 65.

<sup>116</sup>Ralph T. Dudgeon, "Keyed bugle" in The New Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments, ed. Stanley Sadie, vol. 2 (London: Macmillan Press; New York: Grove's Dictionaries of Music, 1984), 415. See also "An Historical Sketch," American Art Journal 27 (July 28, 1877), 167-68.

For the early history of the trumpet in relation to the Bible, see Edward Tarr, The Trumpet, trans. S. E. Plank and Edward Tarr (London: B. T. Batsford, 1988), 21-23; for the general history of the horn, see Kurt Janetzky and Bernhard Brühle, The Horn, trans. James Chater (London: B. T. Batsford, 1988).

<sup>117</sup>Dudgeon, "Keyed bugle," 414.

<sup>118</sup>Matthew 24:31-33.

<sup>119</sup>I Thessalonians 4:14-17.

<sup>120</sup>I Corinthians 15:51-53.



Fig. 1. John Frederick Peto, Old Souvenirs, c. 1881-90.

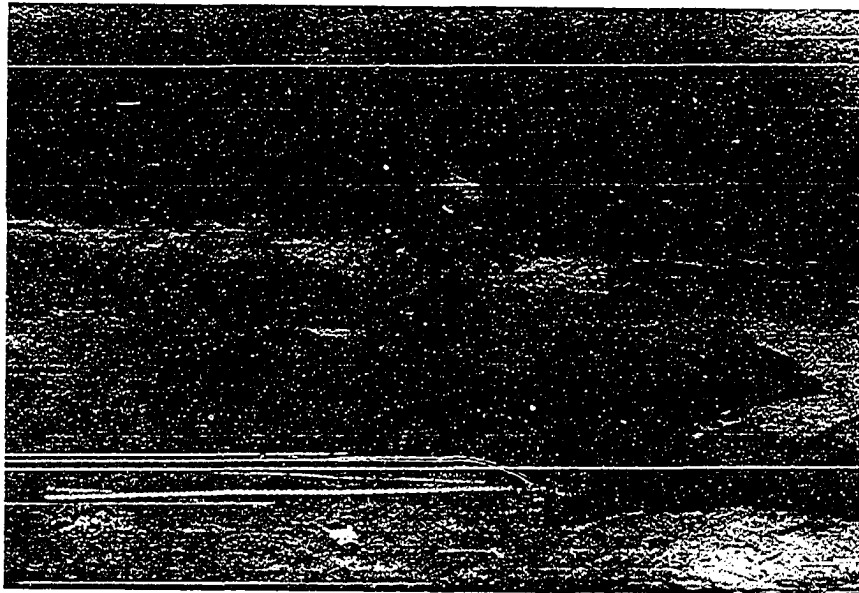


Fig. 2. John Singer Sargent, Neapolitan Children Bathing, 1879.

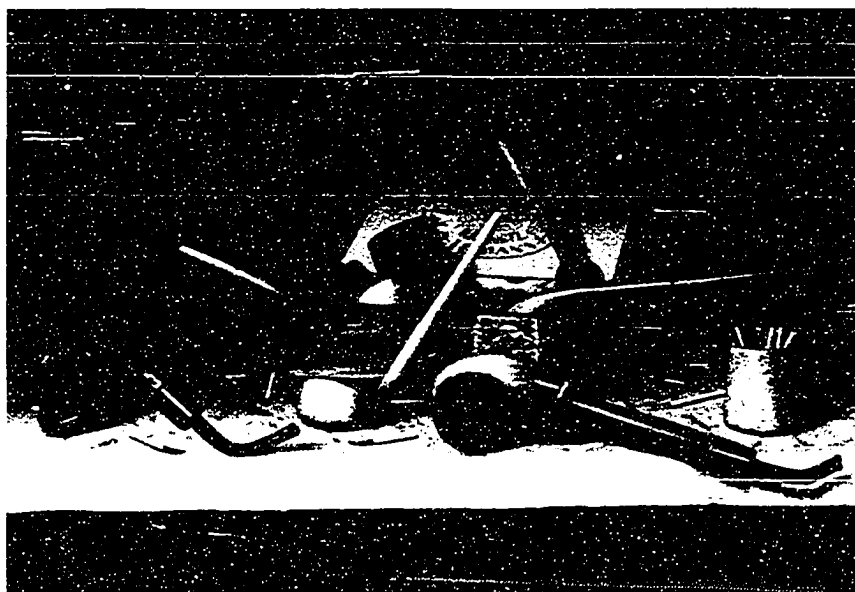


Fig. 3. William Michael Harnett, The Social Club, 1879.

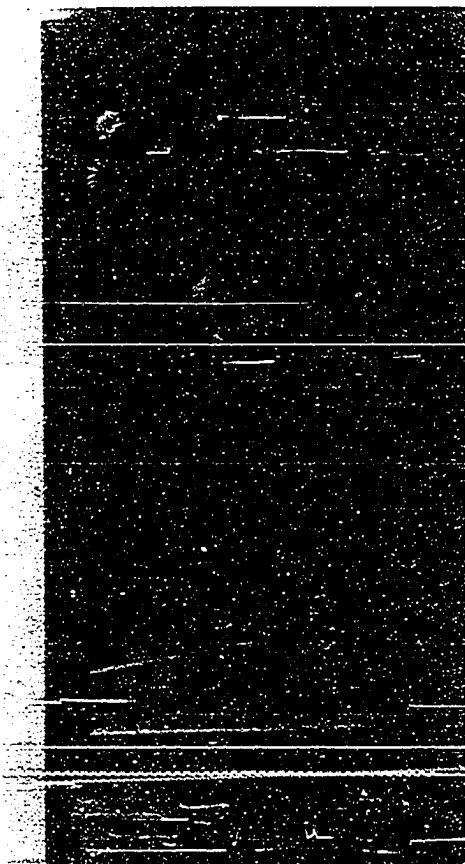


Fig. 4. Charles Willson Peale, The Staircase Group, 1795.

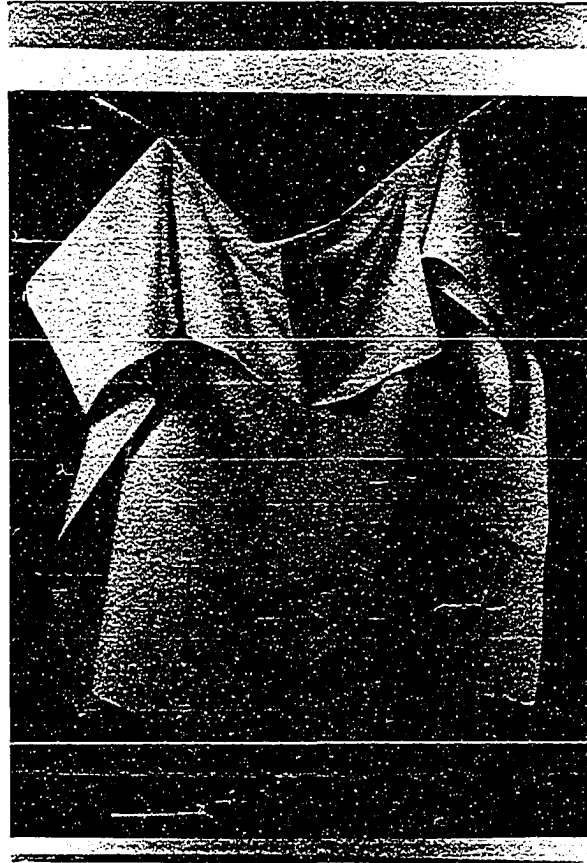


Fig. 5. Raphaelle Peale, Venus Rising from the Sea--A Deception, c. 1822.



Fig. 6. Harnett, After the Hunt, 1885.

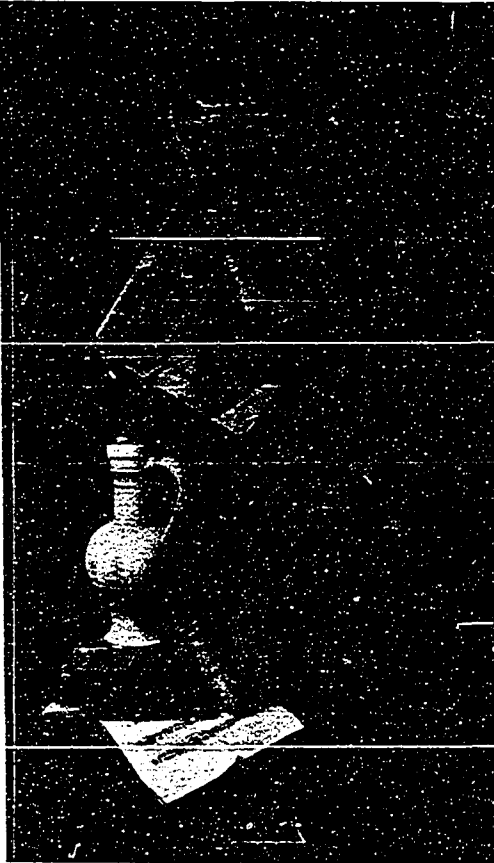


Fig. 7. Harnett, Old Models, 1892.

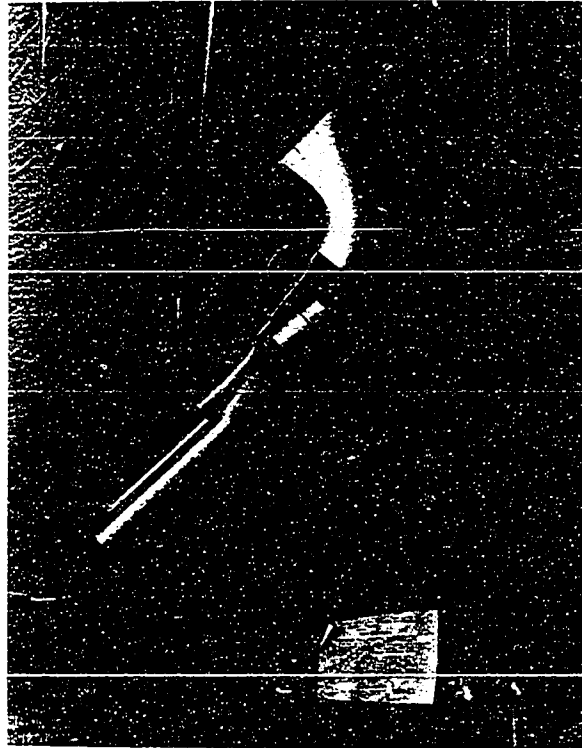


Fig. 8. Harnett, The Faithful Colt, 1890.



Fig. 9. Peto, Discarded Treasures, c. 1904.



Fig. 10. Pierre Roy, Daylight Saving, 1929.



Fig. 11. Harnett, Mortality and Immortality, 1876.



Fig. 12. Harnett, The Old Cupboard Door, 1889.

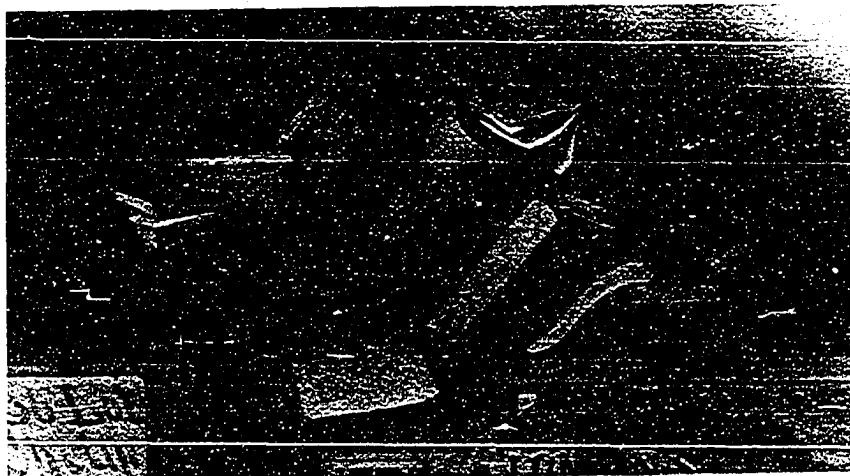


Fig. 13. Harnett, Job Lot Cheap, 1878.



Fig. 14. Harnett, My Gems, 1888.

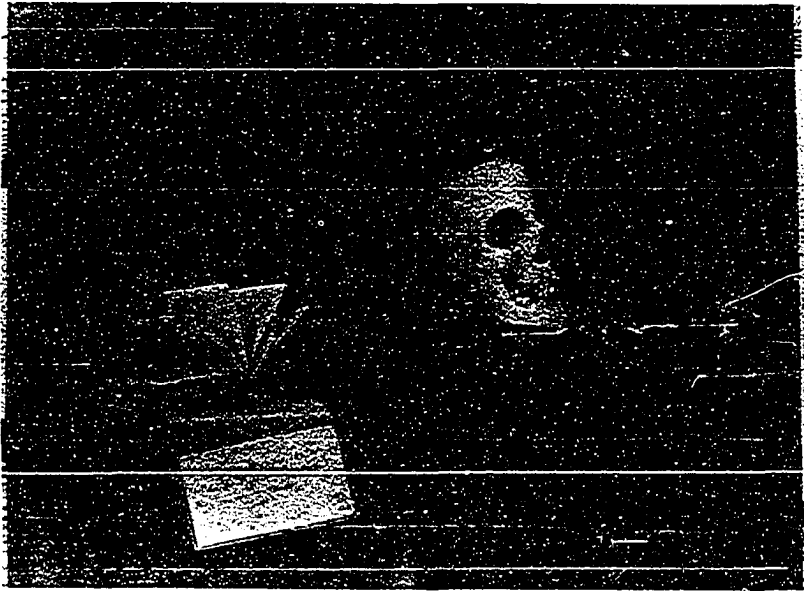


Fig. 15. Harnett, Memento Mori--"To This Favour", 1879.



Fig. 16. Harnett, To This Favor--A Thought from Shakespeare, 1879.



Fig. 17. Harnett, A Study Table, 1882.



Fig. 18. Thomas Smith, Self-Portrait, c. 1680-90.



Fig. 19. Charles Bird King, Poor Artist's Cupboard, c. 1815.



Fig. 20. Alexander Pope, Skull, n.d.

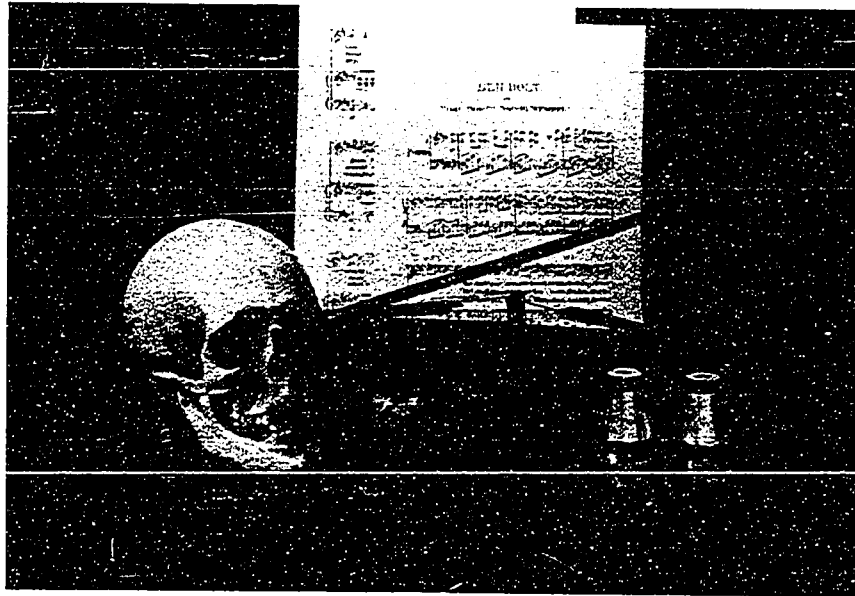


Fig. 21. Louis Maurer, Still Life--"Trilby", c. 1895.

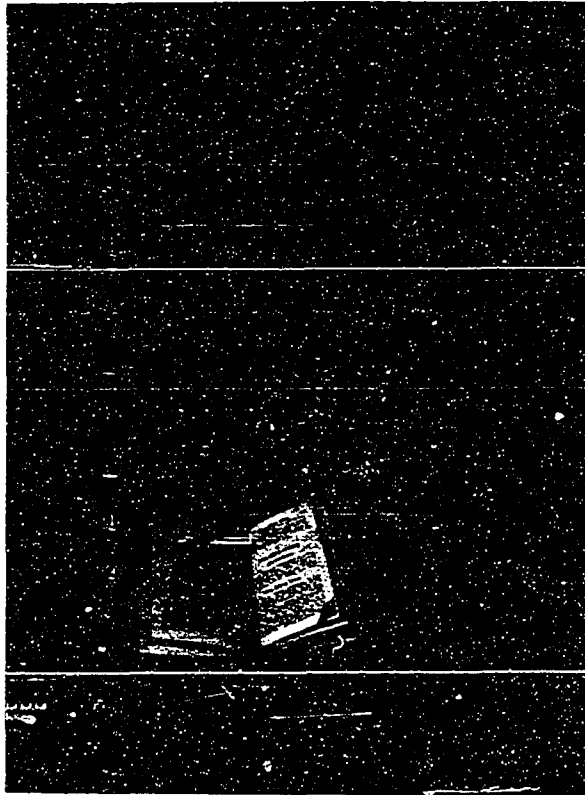


Fig. 22. Thomas Henry Hope, Memento Mori, n.d.

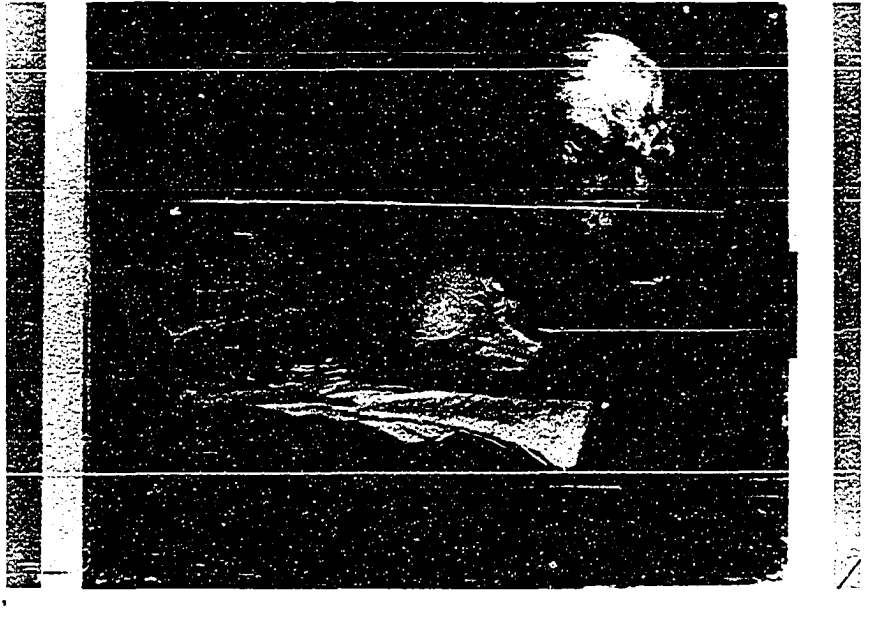


Fig. 23. Charles Yardley Turner, An Emblem of Mortality, 1888.

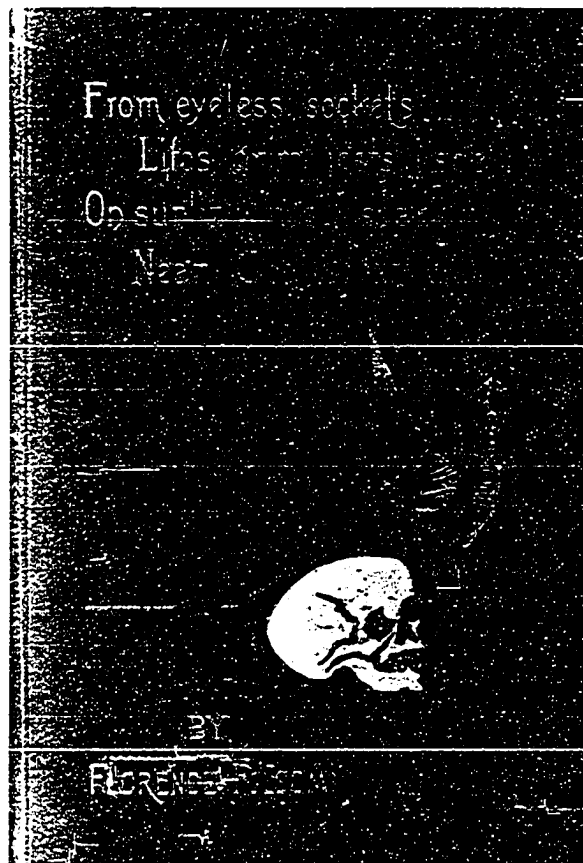


Fig. 24. Cover for Florence Folsom, Love-Lyrics, 1899.

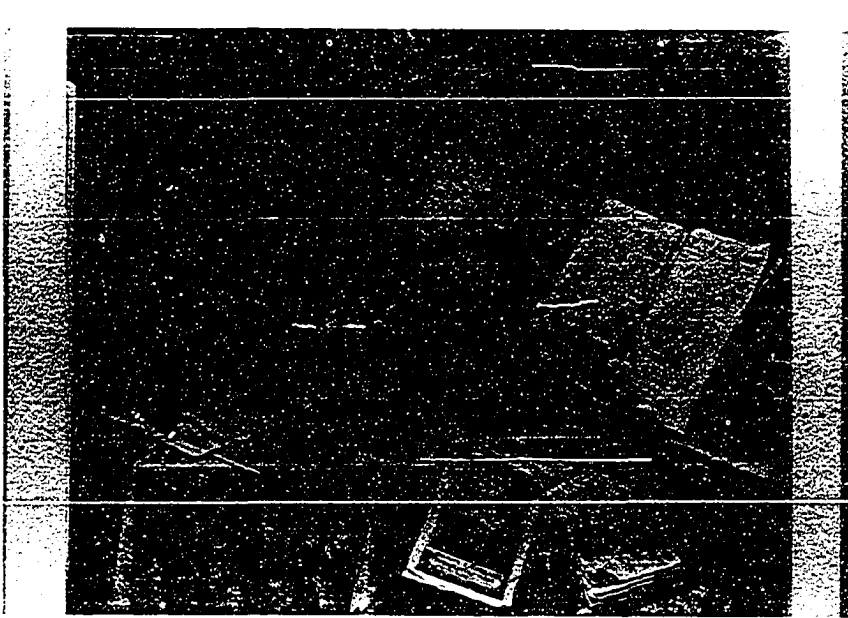


Fig. 25. Evert Collier, Vanitas, 1662.

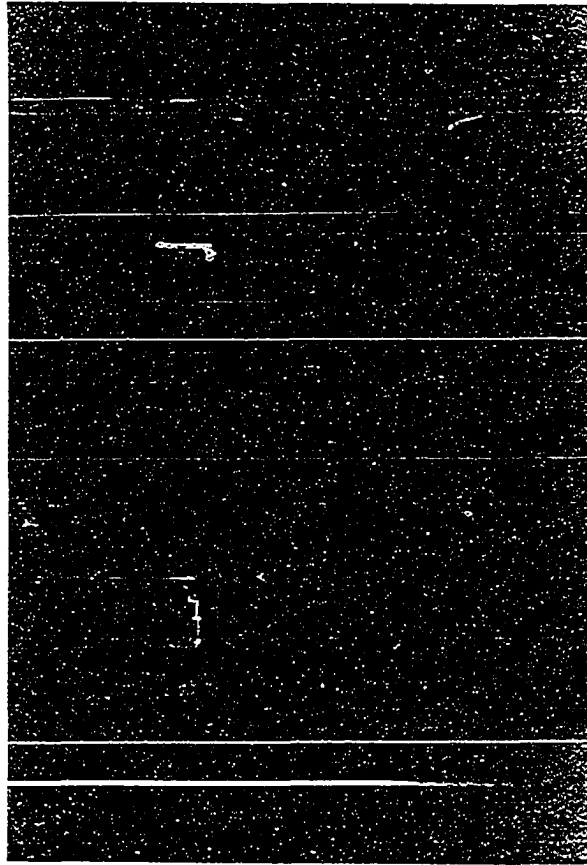


Fig. 26. Ex Maximo Minimum, from Henry Green, Shakespeare and the Emblem-Writers, 1870.

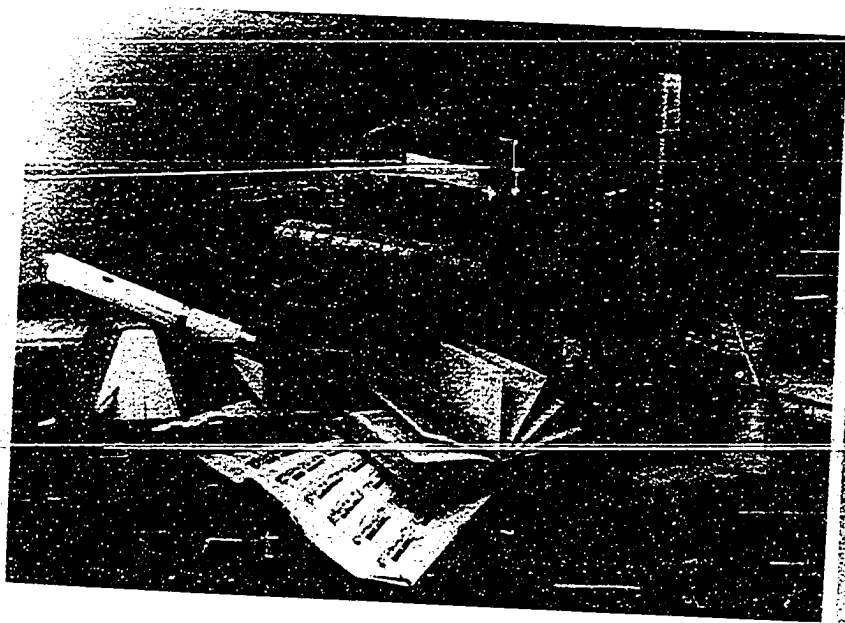


Fig. 27. Harnett, Music and Literature, 1878.



Fig. 28. Harnett, Bard of Avon, 1878.



Fig. 29. Josiah Wedgwood, after John Cheere, Bust of Shakespeare, 1774.

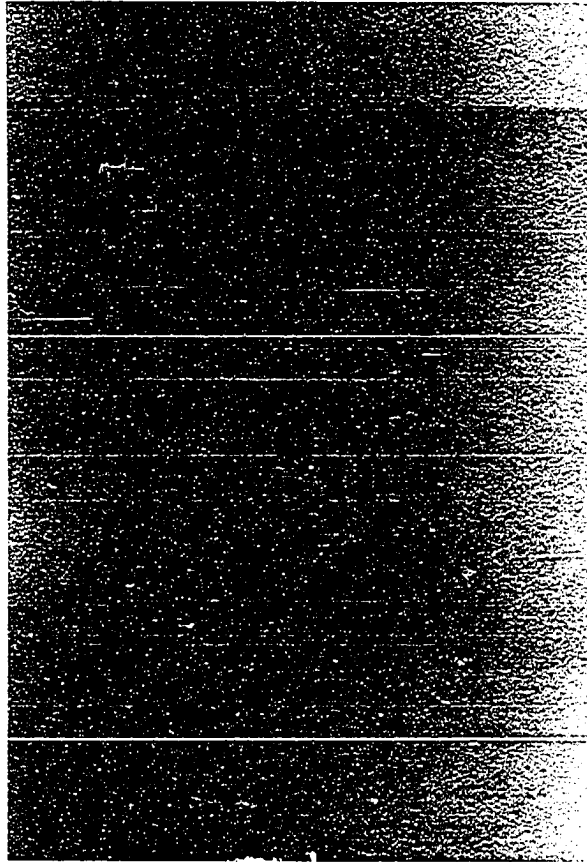


Fig. 30. Symbols of the parts of the Inhabited World, from Henry Green,  
Shakespeare and the Emblem-Writers, 1887.



Fig. 31. Thomas Cole, The Course of Empire: Pastoral State, 1836.

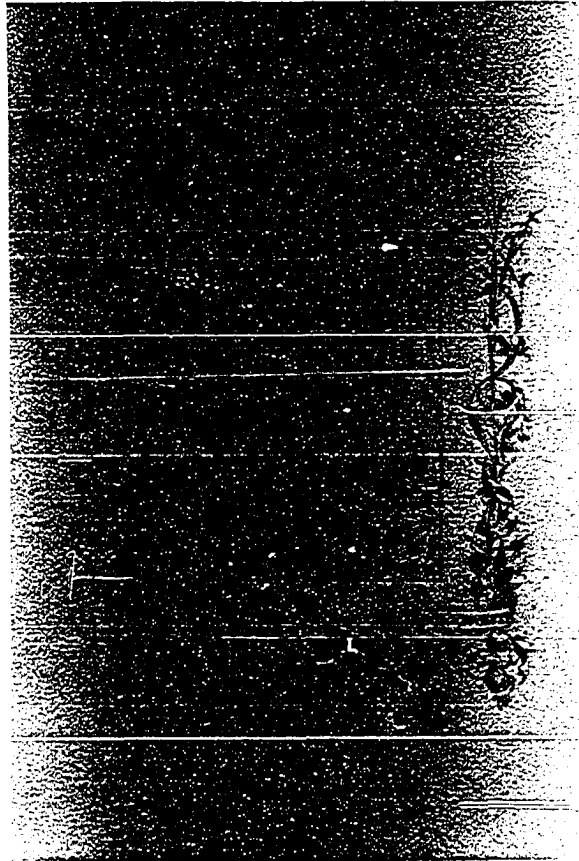


Fig. 32. Emblem IV, from Francis Quarles, Emblems, 1861.



Fig. 33. Lilly Martin Spencer, We Both Must Fade, 1869.

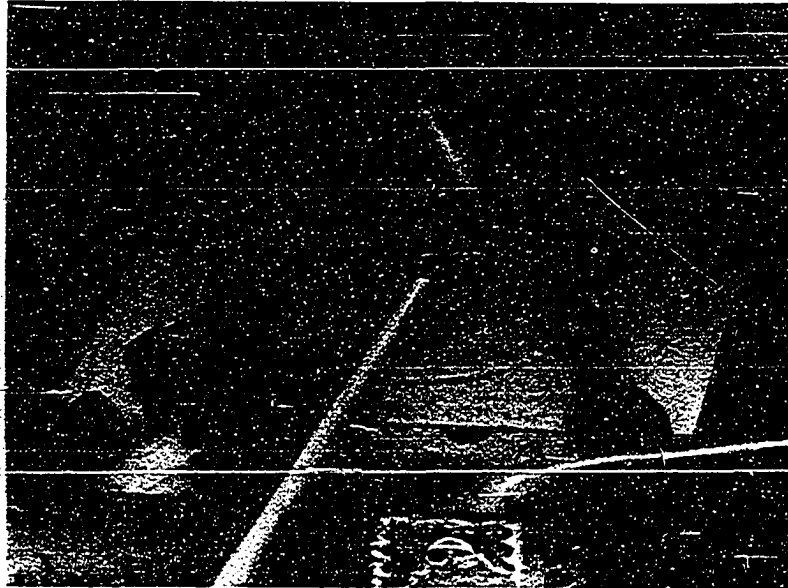


Fig. 34. Harnett, detail of The Social Club, 1879.



Fig. 35. Harnett, detail of The Social Club, 1879.

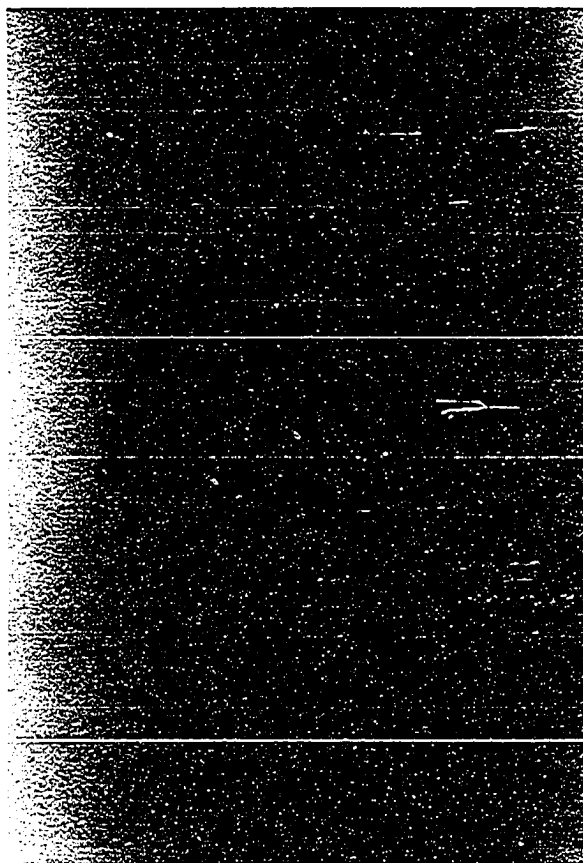


Fig. 36. Alfred Henry Forrester, Pipes, from Alfred Crowquill, The Laughing Philosopher (in the Middle of the Nineteenth Century), 1889.

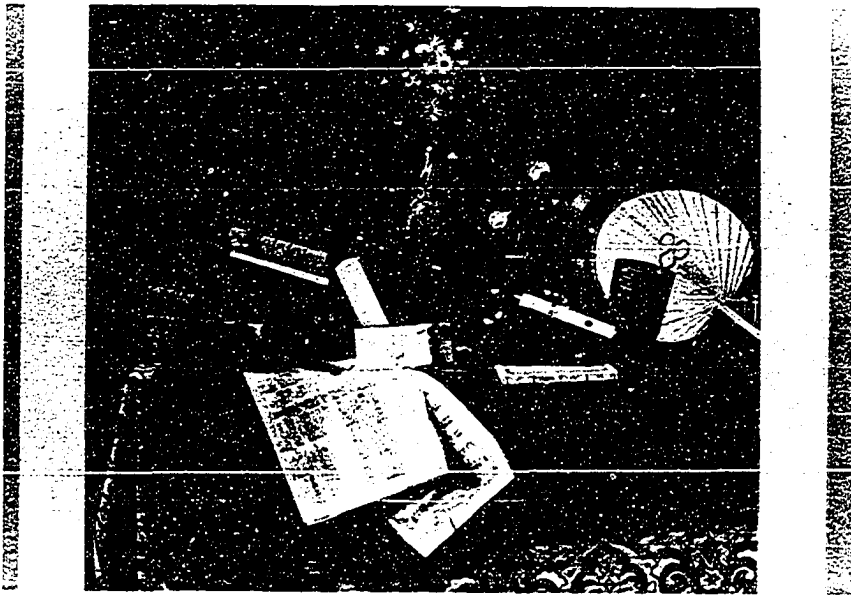


Fig. 37. Harnett, Ease, 1887.



Fig. 38. Harnett, detail of Ease, 1887.

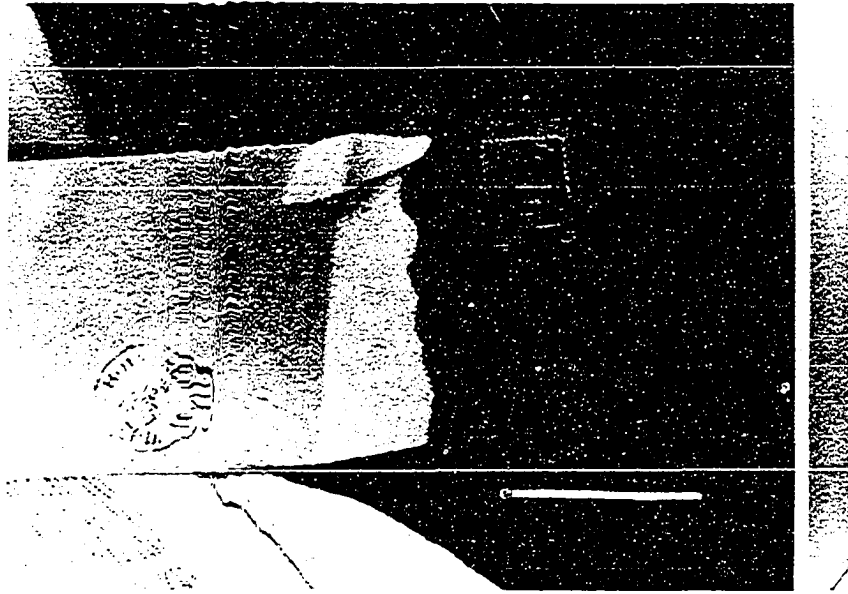


Fig. 39. Harnett, detail of Ease, 1887.

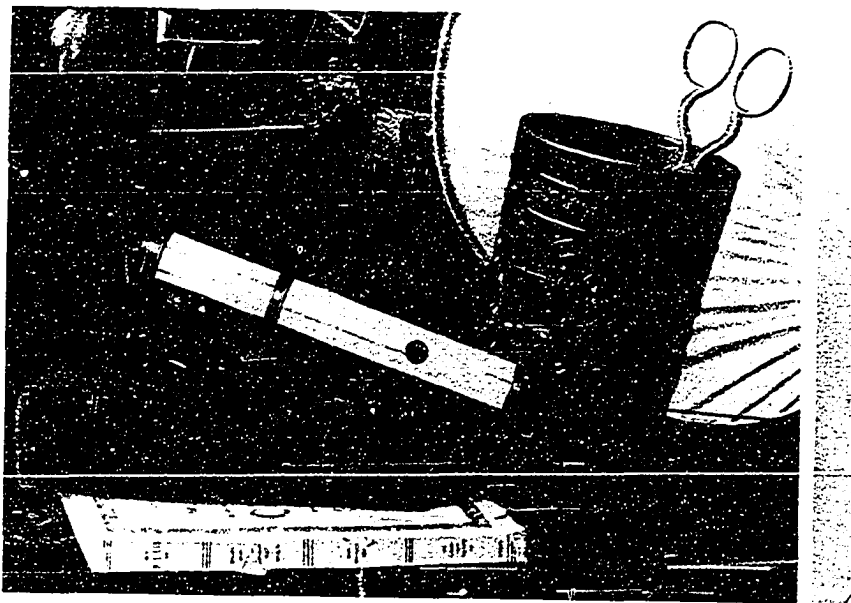


Fig. 40. Harnett, detail of Ease, 1887.

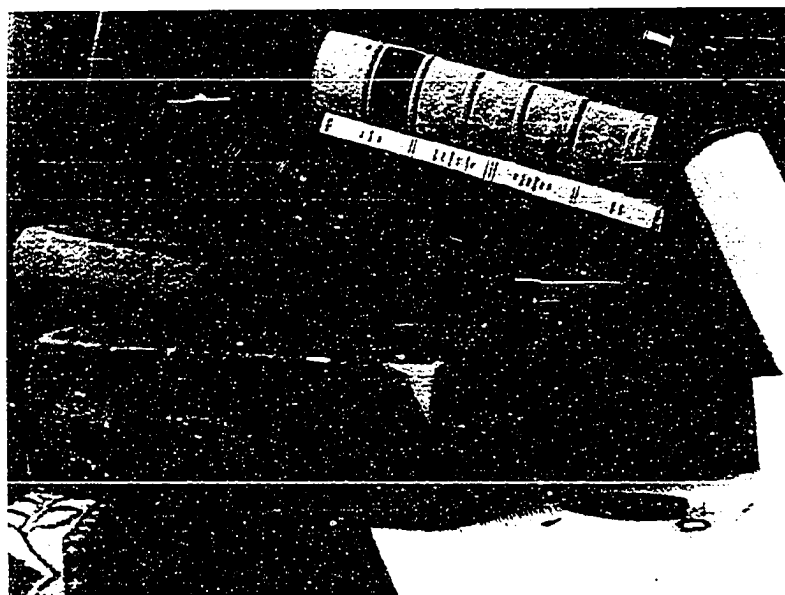


Fig. 41. Harnett, detail of Ease, 1887.

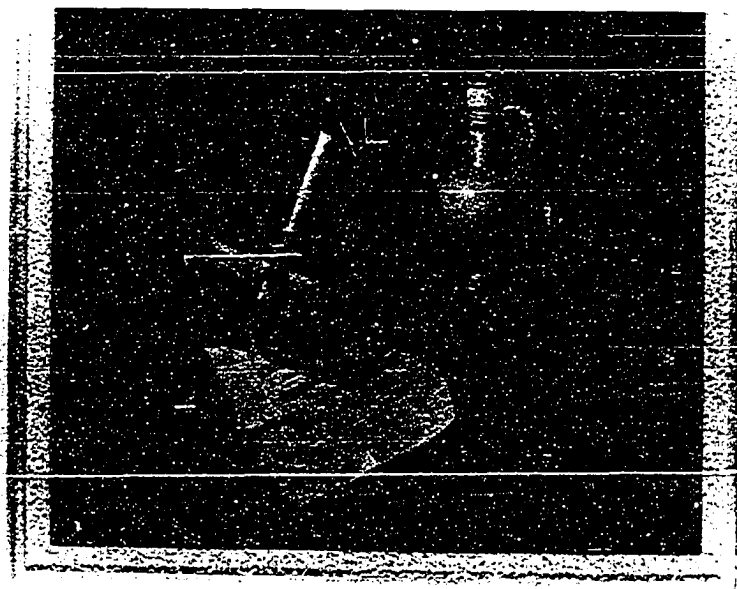


Fig. 42. Harnett, Still Life, 1888.

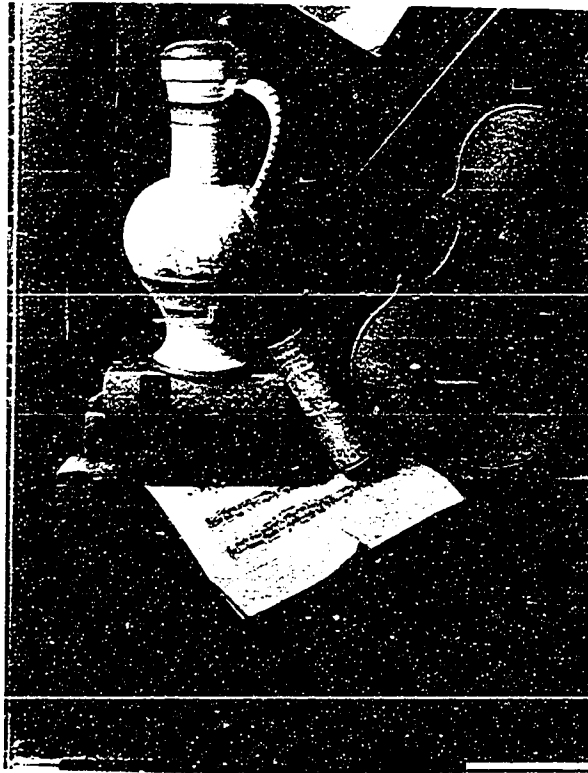


Fig. 43, detail of Old Models, 1892.

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