

WOMAN AND THE SEA:
A METAPHORIC IDENTIFICATION IN
WINSLOW HOMER'S MATURE ART

BY

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

(Art History)

at the

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

1978

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.	iv
CHAPTER	
I. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE WOMAN IMAGE	1
NOTES.	19
II. HOMER'S CHANGE TO A METAPHORIC IMAGE	21
NOTES.	30
III. LITERARY SOURCES OF HOMER'S METAPHOR	31
NOTES.	47
IV. WOMAN AND THE SEA IN HOMER'S MATURE ART.	49
NOTES.	62
V. SHELLEY AS A SOURCE FOR HOMER'S METAPHORIC IMAGE .	63
NOTES.	78
ILLUSTRATIONS.	79
BIBLIOGRAPHY	129

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Professor James Dennis, Department of Art History at the University of Wisconsin-Madison for his help and guidance in my study.

I am also grateful to Lynda Reigstad for typing and Marty Bohnsack for her encouragement and moral support.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure	Page
1. <u>Snap the Whip</u> , 1872. Oil, 12 x 20 inches. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.	79
2. <u>Breezing Up</u> , 1876. Oil, 24 x 38 inches. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.	80
3. <u>Fog Warning</u> , 1885. Oil, 30 x 40 inches. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.	81
4. <u>Eight Bells</u> , 1886. Oil, 25 x 30 inches. Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts.	82
5. <u>Long Branch, New Jersey</u> , 1869. Oil, 16 x 21 3/4 inches. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.	83
6. <u>Paris Mabilie Dance Hall</u> , 1866. Engraving for <u>Harper's Weekly</u> .	84
7. <u>The Bridle Path, Mount Washington</u> , 1868. Oil, 24 x 38 inches. Sterling and Francine Clark Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts.	85
8. <u>Croquet Scene</u> , 1866. Oil, 16 x 26 inches. The Art Institute of Chicago.	86
9. <u>Croquet Players</u> , 1865. Oil, 16 x 26 inches. Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York.	87
10. <u>The Life Line</u> , 1884. Oil, 29 x 45 inches. Philadelphia Museum of Art.	88
11. <u>Undertow</u> , 1886. Oil, 30 x 47 1/2 inches. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts.	89
12. <u>High Tide: The Bathers</u> , 1870. Oil, 26 x 38 inches. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.	90
13. <u>Hunting for Eggs</u> , 1874. Watercolor. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, New York.	91

Figure	Page
14. <u>The New Novel</u> , 1877. Watercolor, 9 1/2 x 20 1/2 inches. Museum of Fine Arts, Springfield, Massachusetts.	92
15. <u>In the Garden</u> , 1874. Watercolor, 9 1/8 x 6 3/4 inches. Collection of Mrs. Arthur G. Altschul, New York.	93
16. <u>The Sick Chicken</u> , 1874. Watercolor, 9 3/8 x 7 3/8 inches. Colby College Art Museum, Waterville, Maine.	94
17. <u>Milking</u> , 1875. Oil, 15 1/2 x 22 3/4 inches. Webb Gallery of American Art, Shelburne Museum, Inc., Shelburne, Vermont.	95
18. <u>Cotton Pickers</u> , 1876. Oil, 24 x 38 inches. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. James C. Brady.	96
19. <u>Fresh Air</u> , 1878. Watercolor, 20 1/4 x 13 3/4 inches. Brooklyn Museum, New York.	97
20. <u>Morning Glories</u> , 1873. Watercolor, 19 1/2 x 13 1/4 inches. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. John W. Warner.	98
21. <u>The Dinner Horn</u> , 1873. Oil, 12 x 14 inches. The Detroit Institute of Arts.	99
22. <u>New England Country School</u> , 1872. Oil, 12 x 18 inches. Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts.	100
23. <u>Shall I Tell Your Fortune?</u> , 1878. Oil. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. R. L. Ritter.	101
24. <u>Inside the Bar</u> , 1883. Watercolor, 15 1/2 x 28 1/2 inches. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.	102
25. <u>Waiting for Dad</u> , 1873. Oil, 9 1/2 x 14 inches. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon.	103
26. Raphael: <u>Galatea</u> , c. 1513. Fresco. Villa Farnesina, Rome.	104
27. Botticelli: <u>Birth of Venus</u> , after 1482. Paint on canvas, 5'9" x 9'2". Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.	105

Figure	Page
28. <u>Promenade on the Beach</u> , 1880. Oil, 20 1/4 x 30 1/8 inches. Museum of Fine Arts, Springfield, Massachusetts.	106
29. <u>The Gale</u> , 1883-93. Oil, 30 1/4 x 48 3/8 inches. Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, Massachusetts.	107
30. <u>Coming Away of the Gale</u> , 1883. Photograph of the painting in its original state. Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick, Maine.	108
31. <u>Perils of the Sea</u> , 1881. Watercolor, 14 5/8 x 21 inches. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts.	109
32. <u>Watching the Tempest</u> , 1881. Watercolor, 14 x 20 inches. Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University.	110
33. <u>Hark! the Lark</u> , 1882. Oil, 36 x 31 inches. Layton Art Gallery Collection, Milwaukee Art Center.	111
34. <u>Flamborough Head</u> , 1882. Drawing, 17 13/16 x 24 inches. The Art Institute of Chicago.	112
35. <u>The Bathers</u> , 1882. Drawing, 12 5/8 x 19 3/4 inches. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.	113
36. Alexandre Cabanel: <u>Birth of Venus</u> . Engraving after the painting exhibited at the Salon of 1863. Photograph from The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.	114
37. <u>The West Wind</u> , 1891. Oil, 30 1/8 x 44 inches. Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts.	115
38. <u>A Summer Night</u> , 1890. Oil, 20 1/2 x 39 3/4 inches. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris.	116
39. <u>A Moonlit Sea</u> , 1890. Watercolor, 14 1/2 x 21 1/2 inches. Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut.	117
40. <u>Looking Out to Sea</u> , date unknown. Oil, 13 1/4 x 19 inches. Fogg Museum of Art, Harvard University.	118

Figure	Page
41. <u>Sunset, Saco Bay</u> , 1896. Oil, 25 x 38 1/2 inches. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts.	119
42. <u>The Fisher Girl</u> , 1894. Oil. Collection of Mr. Burton Mansfield, New Haven, Connecticut.	120
43. <u>On the Cliffs</u> , 1891. Watercolor. Collection of Mr. Thomas L. Manson, New York.	121
44. <u>A Light on the Sea</u> , 1897. Oil, 24 1/4 x 48 1/4 inches. Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.	122
45. <u>Early Evening</u> , 1881-1907. Oil, 33 x 38 3/4 inches. Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.	123
46. <u>The Lookout-"All's Well,"</u> 1886. Oil, 40 x 30 inches. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.	124
47. <u>The Herring Net</u> , 1885. Oil, 29 1/2 x 47 1/2 inches. The Art Institute of Chicago.	125
48. <u>The Dory</u> , c. 1884. Watercolor, 13 3/4 x 20 3/4 inches. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.	126
49. <u>A Voice from the Cliffs</u> , 1883. Watercolor, 20 3/4 x 29 3/4 inches. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Stavros Niarchos, Athens.	127
50. <u>Kissing the Moon</u> , 1904. Oil, 30 x 40 inches. Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts.	128

CHAPTER I

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE WOMAN IMAGE

To the American art public the name Winslow Homer signifies such paintings as Snap the Whip (Fig. 1), Breezing Up (Fig. 2), Fog Warning (Fig. 3) or Eight Bells (Fig. 4). But the casual admirer more than likely does not remember Homer for his many and varied representations of women, even though the woman image appears as the subject of the major proportion of his art. This image is not a static one; rather, it undergoes significant development and enrichment. Homer not only changes the appearance of his woman and her role in society, but also sees her in increasingly symbolic terms. The symbolic function of the woman image reaches its mature stage in 1881, the year of Homer's visit to England, and continues throughout the eighties and the early nineties until, in his later years, Homer's increased preoccupation with pure seascape supercedes her as a larger, more expansive subject.

This study will focus upon the mature period, in which Homer's woman image achieves its symbolic culmination. It will attempt to define his new symbolism through an investigation of literary

influences which account for and define the art. Thus, Winslow Homer's purpose in his mature representation of woman will emerge when woman symbolizes the creative life force in spiritual harmony with the life force of the sea.

Since the study focuses upon the symbolic woman image of Homer's "mature" period, the fact that this period embodies Homer's "mature" viewpoint concerning the essence of womanhood must first be demonstrated. This will be done in a survey of Homer's development of the woman image from the decade of the 1860's until 1881, the year of his departure for England. Secondly, the existence of the woman image as a theme independent of Homer's depictions of men must be established. Comparisons between Homer's contemporaneous representations of men and women at various points throughout his career will illustrate this independence.

The first stylistic period in Homer's development of the woman image comprises the years 1857 to 1870. Why Homer so early concerned himself with woman as an artistic theme deserves speculation. At this time Homer worked as an illustrator for Ballou's Pictorial and Harper's Weekly. These two conservative publications promoted the preservation of proper moral standards. They thus became family favorites, featuring Homer's illustrations of women's activities.

Also, Homer's youthful nature might have predisposed him to depictions of pretty young women. Lloyd Goodrich relates what Homer's friends said about the artist's attraction to beauty:

'He had the usual number of love affairs when he

was a young man,' said one who knew him well. His work gives ample evidence of admiration for feminine beauty. Appearing one day in the Boston studio of his friend Albion Bicknell, he pulled a handful of ribbons out of his pocket and remarked that he had been shopping. 'What do you want of so many ribbons?' asked Bicknell. Homer explained that he had no use for them, but whenever he saw a pretty face behind the counter he would stop and buy a ribbon. From the way he painted women, always young and comely but with an air of innocent wholesomeness, we can conjecture that while susceptible he was no Don Juan. 1

Moreover, the medium of his illustrations further inclined him toward the female image. As engravings, the emphasis in the illustrations remained upon decorative line. The flair of women's costumes, the flip of a hemline, long braids flying in the wind--all proved perfect for Homer's linear medium.

The 1869 oil Long Branch, New Jersey (Fig. 5) represents Homer's stylistic treatment of the woman image previous to 1870 and serves as an example of the general characteristics of this early period. First, this painting conveys Homer's detached point of view, both physically and emotionally. In terms of physical distance, Homer has pushed the women into the middle ground. He rarely paints them in the foreground, close to the picture plane. The women seldom openly confront the viewer, as they avert their gazes. In terms of emotional distance, the viewer does not sense any empathy by the artist toward his subjects. This remoteness certainly contributes to the lack of individual personalities; that is, the artist does not approach his women closely enough to probe their characters. Consequently, they appear as innocuous, vacant creatures.

As in the Long Branch painting, Homer's early women in general usually participate in some mild leisure activity, such as a promenade along the beach, skating, croquet or riding. Homer's depiction of outdoor activity adds a feeling of vitality and optimism which often borders upon amusement over the frivolities of women.

Homer's detached viewpoint and interest in portrayal of actions rather than inner character coincides with his choice of types. The women of Long Branch, New Jersey are not individuals and show no evidence whatsoever of mental ability behind the doll-like faces. Possessing flat and stylized bodies, they resemble cut-out paper-dolls instead of solid, substantial human beings. Homer does, however, give careful attention to their fashion decor. In his costume detail he adheres precisely to the fashion dictates of the time:

In his work one can follow not only changes in style, but the subtler differences between the clothes of the Long Branch belle and her simpler country sister. As the Nation said when his first croquet scenes were first shown in 1866: "As regards costume alone, these pictures ought to be taken care of, that our descendents may see how the incredible female dress of the present day actually did look when worn by active young women." 2

Whether or not, however, these works of the 1870's serve only to illustrate fashion styles requires further attention. Surely, physical activity enhances the movement of a woman's costume, but the introduction of physical activity itself might relate to Homer's view of woman's role during this earliest period. The depiction of woman as a physically active person rather than the Victorian

image of her as a passive prisoner in a secluded domestic interior might represent Homer's attempt to loosen the bonds imposed by Victorian society.

In her M.A. thesis of 1966, Jacqueline Zaro summarizes the popular notion of the nineteenth-century American woman held by American artists:

She is frail, delicate, and doll-like. He has placed her at home, the most fitting situation for a young woman, and she spends her idle hours in meditation. . . .³ She could call on relatives, write notes on pastel stationery, read poetry, or play a musical instrument. 4

It seems likely, therefore, that Homer's image of woman during the 1860's encompasses, but also rises above, the level of decorative fashion illustration. In departing from the conventional Victorian representation of woman Homer possibly implies a comment upon contemporary society.

The 1866 engraving Paris Mabilie Dance Hall (Fig. 6) contains both the elements of decorative fashion illustration and a broadening vision of woman's social possibilities. As the women kick up their legs their voluminous skirts fall in graceful linear patterns. The American public, accustomed to the stereotyped Victorian ideal, expressed surprise at the content of the engraving. When Harper's Weekly printed the engraving, this dour comment appeared alongside:

We shall not venture to look into the abyss on the brink of which these frenzied men and women are dancing, and this too curious crowd of

spectators is treading. This is work for the severe and steady eye of the preacher and moralist. 5

Like the Long Branch painting, The Bridle Path, Mount Washington of 1868 (Fig. 7) depicts an impersonal generalized type of woman stylized in shape and costume. Homer reveals here his ability to record current fashions. The outfit and behavior of the young woman adhere to the fashion dictates enumerated in a popular guidebook called Decorum by S. L. Lewis:

The lady will place herself on the near side of the horse, her skirt gathered up in her left hand, her right hand on the pommel keeping her face towards the horse's head. 6

It [the riding habit] should be made to fit the waist closely and buttoned nearly to the throat. Coat sleeves should come to the wrist, with linen cuffs beneath them.

It is well to have the waist attached to a skirt of the usual length and the long skirt fastened over it so that if any mishap obliges the lady to dismount she may easily remove the long overskirt and still be properly dressed.

The shape of the hat will vary with the fashion but it should always be plainly trimmed; and if feathers are worn, they must be fastened so that the wind cannot possibly blow them over the wearer's eyes.

All ruffling, puffing or bows in the trimming of a riding dress is out of place. If trimming is used it should be put on in perfectly flat bands of braiding. 7

Why Homer chooses at this time to depict women in this impersonal, decorative, and yet active manner remains questionable.

Homer's halcyon paintings of women of the middle or upper class

social milieu might result from his middle class status and upbringing. That his women break the bonds of Victorian society suggests the influence of his own mother. As a young girl she had studied watercolor painting like most girls of upper middle class standing. Yet her art became more than a ladylike pastime, when after her marriage she took lessons and subsequently exhibited her work in professional shows. Her watercolors, almost all of flowers, show the painstaking accuracy of a botanist combined with an instinct for decorative design. Winslow Homer recognized his mother's ability and paid it a personal tribute. For many years after her death he kept a group of her paintings in his studio, the only paintings by another artist he ever possessed.⁸

Homer's impersonal, detached point of view in his depiction of women appears to coincide with the life style of his youth. Incidents throughout his life support the conclusion that Homer was peculiarly shy and reserved with women. James Flexner in The World of Winslow Homer says that there was "something shy about him, a distance that never allowed women to get really close to him except for those within the relaxed circle of the family."⁹ So too, Philip Beam comments:

He showed the respect and chivalry toward women normal to his time, and treated them continually in his work. As a young man he was attracted to girls but not wholly at ease with them. . . . With his associates he never showed any interest in discussing women romantically; when with guides or lumberjacks he would listen to and apparently enjoy a funny off-color story, but he never volunteered any himself. 10

Many biographers have commented upon his reserved attitude with his women models. He supposedly wanted no giggling girls around unattended, and in order to have a proper chaperone, at one time obtained the services of the model's grandfather to carry his pencils, of which there were two. He never painted from the nude female model, the nearest thing to it being a maniken or wooden doll which he always employed clothed.

Perhaps the most relevant indication of Homer's shyness lies in the art itself. In addition to Homer's remote objectivity, Hunter Ingalls notices an absence of male-female interaction in the series of croquet scenes of the 1860's. In the Croquet Scene of 1866 (Fig. 8) a man kneels between two women, his face concealed by a hat. In Croquet Players of 1865 (Fig. 9) a man stands in the background. In four other versions men are completely absent. Ingalls cites the text of the July 10, 1869 Appleton's Journal which comments:

It has indeed been wickedly intimated that the real popularity of croquet is derived from another cause. There is more or less flirtation connected with the game, it is believed, and the admirable opportunities it offers for little coquettish comedies are supposed to have largely to do with the favor that the sport enjoys . . . hence young men and women find the sport highly conducive to that keener and subtler game that youth and beauty are always eager to play. But Mr. Homer, in his sketch, has drawn only women players. 11

From such irregularities, Ingalls concludes:

It does not seem out of keeping with the facts of Homer's life to see the withdrawal of male

figures from these scenes--and especially the hesitancy and concealment of those men who do appear as subconscious pictorial manifestations of male embarrassment in feminine company. . . . From the kneeling man on the croquet court and the boy in school hiding his face in his book, to the men of The Life Line and The Undertow, almost every male who appears in mature female company in a painting either averts his gaze or has his head concealed. And in such illustrations as All in the Gay and Golden Weather, The Summit of Mt. Washington, and The Straw Ride, wherein both men's and women's faces appear, there is little or no correspondence or sense of communication between the sexes. 12

As Ingalls observes in The Life Line (Fig. 10) and Undertow (Fig. 11), this lack of male-female interaction will occur throughout his later art. Whereas Homer's objectivity in the portrayal of women and his hesitancy to show them in communication with men may derive from Homer's personal awkwardness and restraint during his youth, these same traits assume symbolic importance in his mature period when Homer differentiates men and women in terms of their relation to the sea.

Homer tempers his objectivity, remoteness and stylization during the 1870's, reflecting possibly a change in his personal life. A comparison of the 1869 Long Branch, New Jersey painting with High Tide: The Bathers (Fig. 12) of the following year indicates the changes that occur.

In High Tide: The Bathers the three female figures exhibit a new physicality opposed to the flattened stylization of the 1860 figures. Homer now adds more anatomical detail along with an individualization of facial features so that each woman becomes a distinct thinking

personality, more a portrait than an innocuous type. These changes in appearance may be interpreted as a change in Homer's point of view. His attitude apparently becomes less remote, more intimate. Although still reserved, the artist moves in closer to his models, placing them in the foreground of the picture. In such paintings as Hunting for Eggs (Fig. 13), The New Novel (Fig. 14), and In the Garden (Fig. 15), Homer shows his new preference to paint single individuals rather than group scenes such as Long Branch, New Jersey. All these elements contribute to the quieter, more lyrical mood that permeates the painting High Tide: The Bathers.

A survey of the paintings of the seventies reveals that Homer abandons his depiction of the upper middle class city women of the sixties in favor of the country woman. During the 1870's Homer spent much more time in the Adirondacks, so that this new intimate portrait might stem from his greater familiarity with rural life.

His country women are usually engaged in one way or another in some form of agrarian conservation or teaching. They feed chickens (The Sick Chicken, Fig. 16), milk cows (Milking, Fig. 17), pick cotton (Cotton Pickers, Fig. 18), tend sheep (Fresh Air, Fig. 19), cultivate nature (Morning Glories, Fig. 20), keep house (The Dinner Horn, Fig. 21), or teach school (New England Country School, Fig. 22). These are conservative roles--woman acts as preserver and teacher of the agrarian mode of life. In his women of the 1870's Homer thus expresses the fullness of beauty embodied by the country woman.

Perhaps the most personal work of this period is Shall I Tell

Your Fortune? of 1878 (Fig. 23). Supposedly Homer kept this painting on an easel in his studio throughout his life, for it represents the young woman with whom he was in love during the early seventies. Jean Gould, in Winslow Homer, A Portrait, gives a full account of the romance.¹³ According to Gould, Homer first saw the girl at Long Branch toward evening when the tide was beginning to rise, and the beach was almost deserted. He asked her and her two companions to pose, but they refused. As they were leaving he sketched the lines of the one wearing the tight-fitting cap in High Tide. Following this chance meeting, he next encountered her at a dance where he learned that she was a schoolteacher. The following spring he visited her in Hurley, New York, where he made studies of her for New England Country School. From then on he visited her quite frequently during the fall and winter months. However, as Gould concludes, "He had to admit that it was not simply a question of finances that held him back from the responsibility of marriage; he wanted to be master of his art first."¹⁴ Consequently, when she became impatient about putting off marriage and gave him an ultimatum, he came to the decision that his art meant more to him than anything else in life. However, before they separated, Homer painted her picture in the mauve dress with the black and white striped petticoat. She holds a handful of cards, saying "Shall I Tell Your Fortune?"--a question perhaps aimed at Homer himself.

That Homer's female image changes into a warm intimate portrait of the country woman may result partly from this affair. Lloyd

Goodrich, for example, attributes his new delicate feeling for individual character to the influence of this romantic involvement.¹⁵ That this involvement, combined with Homer's move to the Adirondack countryside, changes Homer's outlook seems quite possible.

As his affair ended, so did his warm intimate portraits of the country women characterizing the seventies. The woman of the 1893 painting Inside the Bar (Fig. 24) differs radically from the women in High Tide: The Bathers. What appears as wholesomeness in the earlier work now emerges as strength and stamina. What is femininity later leans toward masculinity and determination. And, what is lyric becomes heroic. Physically, the woman of Inside the Bar acquires a substantial massiveness. Her shoulders and arms exhibit a muscularity supported by a larger bone and muscle structure. Homer asserts this muscularity through the rolled-up shirtsleeves, frequently employed in the later paintings.

Complementing the woman's increased corporeality, a greater animation of strength appears. In contrast to the woman of High Tide, this new breed of woman no longer remains passive or static. She assumes a masculine stance, feet planted firmly apart, hands on hips. Through such transformations, Homer proclaims her an "heroic" type.

Aside from the heroism of these women, Homer's assumption of a type in itself expresses a change from the studied individuals of the 1870's. The woman of Inside the Bar exhibits the generalized facial features found in the women of Homer's mature style. Homer

devotes little attention to facial distinctions. Such a lack of individualization sustains the absence of physical and emotional immediacy with the viewer. The women of High Tide suggest a close-up focus of vision, a pervasive intimate quality of gentle lyricism. In contrast, the fisherwoman of Inside the Bar infers a distant, impersonal viewpoint. Instead of a gentle lyricism, she presents a sobriety in conjunction with her heroic disposition. Homer eliminates the overt femininity of the seventies. Certainly a sense of the artist's admiration for her is not totally absent, but unlike Homer's earlier admiration for the woman of the seventies, this admiration derives from other sources. The fact of Homer's adoption of a type presupposes an altered artistic purpose, a new role for his women. Examination of the paintings following 1881 reveals no drastic difference in the domestic duties of his women from those of the earlier works. Still evident are women with babies on their backs, as represented in the 1873 painting Waiting for Dad (Fig. 25).

A change does occur, however, in the basic role of the fisherwives over and above that of the country wives of before. The working women of this later period exhibit an equal status with men as partners and participants in the struggle for survival. Furthermore, it is not an overstatement to say that the women become "more than equal" to the men, for the depictions of women prevail over those of men from here on. Yet, their relationship with the sea exists on a much higher level than the level of man against the forces of nature. John Wilmerding, for example, says that in these

women Homer sees "both the physical power of nature and the solid resourcefulness of the human condition."¹⁶ Certainly this is a large factor, yet as have those historians for whom the woman image exemplifies man's struggle against nature, Wilmerding overlooks the essential key.

This assumption of woman into the larger scheme of "man" has prevented her investigation as a separate theme. Through contrasts of the woman image with that of the male I will verify that its thematic singularity truly does exist, that consequently the repeated notion of "man against nature" rightly applies only to those paintings of men and the sea. The crucial point remains that Homer could have expressed the "man against nature" theme as convincingly through depiction of men battling the elements. However, he did not choose to limit himself to a masculine drama. In fact, most of his paintings done in the eighties portray women. More specifically, they develop the motif of woman as spiritually identified with the sea. This identification and communication starts at Tynemouth, Northumberland in the early 1880's and develops until Homer finally equates woman with the sea. Such a synthesis consequently comprises a statement specifically related to womanhood through the artist's conscious majority of women in place of men. This statement can be understood by juxtaposing the contemporaneous paintings of men and the sea to those of women.

In Eight Bells (Fig. 4), men perform as the principal actors in the drama. Their actions reveal that they are shooting the sun

with a sextant. Dressed in oilskins they carefully make their observations and technically plot their course. These oilskins, hats, and other miscellaneous gear protect them physically from nature's harsh elements. All in all, the men, aided by their man-made instruments, quite confidently cope with the challenge of the sea.

The idea of man coping with the sea appears again in Fog Warning (Fig. 3), in which a man similarly engages in the sea-faring activity of catching fish. The viewer detects the man's intense anxiety as he hurries toward shore upon hearing the warning sound. Here, too, adequate precautions against nature's forces have been taken, for in the boat lie all the tools of his trade: a rope, barrel, and anchor. The total impression is one of an individual struggling against the sea. Truly, as Wilmerding writes, Homer reveals man's solid resourcefulness to cope with the power of nature.

This confrontation surely does not comprise the essence of Inside the Bar, or of any other paintings of woman during this culminating period. The women are not physically protected from the elements by their attire; on the contrary, they move exposed to the cruel salt spray and gusty winds. Rarely do they engage in constructive activity; they do not handle technical instruments or equipment in their endeavors. Unlike the men who function as separate entities against the sea, the women unite with it physically, spiritually, and supernaturally.

In interpreting the symbolic importance of this liaison, the central consideration focuses on the sea as a metaphoric frame of

reference. It has throughout human history, in science, art or literature, connoted the surging force of creation. The sea has acquired a life of its own, and symbolizes the ultimate source of human life.

In Egyptian mythology the primordial ocean was called "Nun," in which before creation lay the germs of all things and all beings. The Egyptians saw Nun as a personage plunged up to his waist in water, holding up his arms to support the gods who had issued from him.¹⁷

Likewise, Assyro-Babylonian mythology attributes to the ocean the creative power of life. Water is the primordial element. From the fusion of sweet water (Apsu) and salt water (Tiamut) arose all beings, beginning with the gods. The Apsu was a kind of abyss filled with water which encircled the earth. The earth was a round plateau. Around this plateau stood mountains on which rested the vault of heaven. From the Apsu came the springs which broke through the surface of the earth.

Tiamut was the personification of the sea and represented the feminine element which gave birth to the world. In the continuation of the story she represents the blind forces of primitive chaos against which the intelligent gods struggle.¹⁸ This recalls the dichotomy between the male and female relationship with the sea in Winslow Homer's paintings. The women represent the intuitive element in spiritual identification with the sea, whereas the men are the "intelligent gods" who struggle against nature's forces.

Comparable in Greek mythology to the Apsu is the River Oceanus. Like the Apsu, the Greeks saw Oceanus as an immense liquid girdle around the universe. It lay beyond the sea and embraced it without mingling with its water. Oceanus supposedly gave birth to all rivers, the sea, and to all waters issuing from the earth. It was an elemental force which had contributed to the formation of the world. When the Olympians established their empire over the waters the watery element was inherited by Poseidon. Nereus had fifty daughters, the Nereids, fair virgins with golden hair who often frolicked on the crest of the waves. Thus, in Greek mythology, the ocean itself was an elemental life-giving force and the Nereids themselves were creations of this force entirely at harmony with it.¹⁹

Galatea, one of these Nereids, became popular in mythological paintings throughout the history of art. One of the most well-known depictions of her by Raphael (Fig. 26) in the Villa Farnesina (1513) shows the sea nymph in triumph on a shell drawn by dolphins and attended by sea nymphs and Tritons. She little resembles the slender Venus of Botticelli (Fig. 27), who likewise glides to shore upon a shell. However, both show woman born from the sea, the elemental life-giving force.

This long-standing metaphor of the sea as the creative source of life prepares for Homer's correlation of woman and the sea. Through the psychological identification of woman with the sea, Homer thus defines woman, not as the habitual "man against nature" symbol, but as the source of creative life comparable to the sea. As such, she

personifies the role of human progenitor. She becomes more than a preserver; she is a primal source, the creator and supporter of life. Woman thus stands as the human counterpart of the sea, to which she is intrinsically linked in spiritual communication. This spiritual intimacy explains her innate sensibility, her supernatural ability to communicate with the rolling ocean.

NOTES

¹Lloyd Goodrich, Winslow Homer (New York: Macmillan Company, 1945), p. 24.

²Ibid., p. 28.

³Jacqueline Zaro, "The Anonymous Young Woman in American Painting, 1880-1963, From Image to Symbol," M.A. Thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1966, p. 11.

⁴Ibid., p. 27.

⁵James Thomas Flexner, The World of Winslow Homer, 1836-1910 (New York: Time Inc., 1966), p. 51.

⁶S. L. Lewis, Decorum (Chicago: Acme Publishing House, 1883), p. 131.

⁷Ibid., p. 275.

⁸Printed in Philip C. Beam's Winslow Homer at Prout's Neck (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1966), p. 36 is Winslow Homer's letter to his sister-in-law, in which he shows his great respect for his mother's talent and independence: "Dear Mattie: I find Mother very much better. In fact to me she seems very well. She laughed at the amusing pictures in The Graphic and stated as to her surroundings that the Queen of England could not be better cared for. That her bed was the best that Father or she had ever had-- That the food and attendance she considered unequal, and she has all the company that she wishes--She wishes it understood that when she gets old her greatest comfort will be to do as she likes--and when she gets sick it will be time enough for her to have a companion."

⁹Flexner, p. 85.

¹⁰Beam, p. 193.

¹¹Hunter Ingalls, "Elements in the Development of Winslow Homer," Art Journal, 24, No. 1 (Fall 1964), p. 20.

¹²Ibid.

¹³ Jean Gould, Winslow Homer, A Portrait (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1962), pp. 114-131.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 131.

¹⁵ Goodrich, pp. 55-56, writes: "Still not idealized, they [women] were pictured with a delicate precision, a sensitiveness to individual character, that would have made him one of our finest portraitists. The note of sentiment was stronger, but still reserved, implicit rather than openly expressed. The artist's attitude, though warmer and more intimate than before, was far from the sensuousness of Manet and Renoir or the mordant realism of Degas."

¹⁶ John Wilmerding, Winslow Homer (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), p. 183.

¹⁷ Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology (London: Paul Hamlyn Limited, 1959), p. 11.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 50.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 167.

CHAPTER II

HOMER'S CHANGE TO A METAPHORIC IMAGE

Having traced the development of Homer's woman image to the culminating period of the 1880's, established its existence as a singular theme, and noted the symbolic nature of this theme, investigation of possible causes for this thematic reorientation may proceed. Such investigation will ultimately suggest a reason for not only the change, but will also define the substance of the change itself.

One determinant alone could never explain Homer's motivation for a radical change toward a symbolic interpretation of woman and the sea, nor would it explain his choice of this specific symbolism. A combination of personal, artistic and objective factors more successfully accounts for such a change. One possible factor is a change in environment. In 1881 Homer traveled to England and settled in Tynemouth, located on the North Sea. There he lived alone in a small house within the fishing community. In this location he viewed a climate and a type of woman different from New England, the two elements that were to change dramatically in his

art.

Unlike the moderate weather changes of Gloucester, the elements in Tynemouth were threatening, more sublime. The climate on the North Sea proved stormy, changeable, and dynamic. Wind, cloud and sea moved with a greater speed than Homer had ever seen. Such a radical change in climate gave Homer a new sensibility to the weather. His paintings and studies of clouds, mist and fog dramatize the effects of changing light on the sea and the frightening power of wind and wave.

The women of Tynemouth likewise differed from those Homer had seen in the pleasant seashore and rural surroundings of the eastern United States. As Goodrich describes:

The Northumbrian fisherfolk, of part Scandanavian blood, were a hardy race. When the men brought in their heavy snub-nosed boats after the day's fishing, their women and children were waiting for them on the beach, and after the men had plodded wearily home the women unloaded the catch, carried it to the market and got the boats ready for another day. These women were a new type for Homer--sturdy creatures capable of a man's work, blond, strongly Nordic, ruddy from outdoor life, handsome in their robust way. 1

Certainly Homer's attitudes toward nature and his tastes in women could not help but change in response to this new exposure. Yet this change does not abruptly occur as a result of a novel experience. A more dramatic rendering of the sea and symbolic interpretation of woman appear in the 1880 painting Promenade on the Beach (Fig. 28), executed prior to his departure for Tynemouth.

This picture contradicts the view of many art historians that the Tynemouth experience alone effected the change. The new environment may have acted as a catalyst. However, the 1880 painting intimates a maturation in Homer's art of which the trip was only an outgrowth. In this painting Homer significantly changes the setting. The women appear silhouetted against the sea and pursue no further occupation than a simple stroll. In addition, a somberness pervades the work, a somberness not present in any of Homer's 1870 paintings of pleasant rural life, such as Waiting for Dad or Breezing Up. Verging on a sense of eeriness, the colors are darker than these earlier works, consisting of deep blues and blacks with peculiar yellow and yellow-green contrasts. Moreover, like the impersonal, doll-like figures of the 1860's, these women have once again become distant and remote, anticipating the "types" that will become a predominant feature of his mature style, as we have already witnessed in Inside the Bar. They likewise convey a certain apprehension in their gaze, a non-descript feeling of foreboding that finds its fulfillment in the spiritual and supernatural identification of woman and the sea in the works following the Tynemouth stay. Consequently, the Tynemouth experience serves as a timely stimulus for a need already exerting its pressure upon Homer in America. Flexner concludes:

This primordial aspect of man's struggle for existence appealed to his deepest feelings, but in America he could not break the long-established habit of painting the smiling things, although they no longer supported his temperamental needs. 2

Factors in his personal life no doubt also exercised considerable influence upon this new conception. Goodrich suggests that Homer's sudden departure for England signaled his increasing need for solitude resulting from his presumed disappointment in a love affair.³ The related view also prevails in Winslow Homer literature that the resumed detachment and new interest in raw nature represents abandonment of the warm, intimate scenes of the 1870's painted while Homer was happily in love. Donelson Hoopes explains:

His choice of subject matter seems related to the presumed recent affair of the heart. The single dominant note in this year of work was the theme of the women of Tynemouth. Both the oils and the watercolors are heavy with the somberness of his subjects. 4

Likewise, Goodrich attributes a definite impact to the artist's romantic attachment:

As far as we know, no other woman ever took her place. By middle life Homer was a confirmed bachelor. That this affair deeply affected his attitude towards women and society, there can be no question. In his youth, though reserved, he had led a normal social life. From this time on he became more and more unsociable, and his taste for solitude grew. And after a few years women were to disappear from his art. 5

Expanding upon this statement, Goodrich explains:

This [Light on the Sea] was his last painting in which a woman appeared. Even in these three works [Light on the Sea, The Fisher Girl, and Sunset, Saco Bay], women were seen quite without sexual feelings. Physically they were like men, outdoors,

tanned, hardy, without a trace of feminine charm. In his attitude towards them there was neither sentiment nor sensuousness. The warmth and intimacy that had begun to appear in the work of his middle years had vanished, together with his delicate feeling for individual character. . . . Sex, central element in man's emotional attitude towards the work and one of the roots of art with him had become severely sublimated. Human emotion was avoided, and all his great vitality was channeled into the picturing of external nature, with increasing mastery, but no greater passion. It is not farfetched to connect this lack of human emotion with the relative externality of his art, its lack of inner heat, its limitations in plasticity and movement. 6

Granted, any interpretation of Homer's image of woman must consider the relation between his inner emotional life and creative intent. However, the arguments by Goodrich and Hoopes are presumptuous in their total preoccupation with this isolated factor without acknowledgement of other equally important conditions.

Moreover, Goodrich views Homer's psychological conflicts only as a negative influence upon Homer's art, in that these conflicts lead Homer away from the human figure toward pure seascape. Goodrich confuses the depiction of "external" nature with "externality." He equates human emotion with human figures, sentiment, sensuousness, and fails to recognize the artist's passion for the elements of nature.

Hunter Ingalls, on the other hand, views Homer's development as a positive and constant progression toward a more intense treatment of nature. Therefore, according to Ingalls, "such conflict [psychological] should not be considered solely a restricting element

in Homer's development."⁷

One may not ascertain the degree of influence, whether positive or negative, of Homer's emotional life upon his art. Certainly, any work does to some extent reflect the artist's personal life, especially a work dealing with the image of woman. However, subjective analyses of the artist's personal life may not only place undue emphasis upon this personal life, but also project the critic's own values upon it. For example, Goodrich concludes that Homer's disappointment in love led to his taste for solitude and the withdrawal of human emotion from his art. Yet the fact remains that Homer had always been reserved and inward, so that Homer's withdrawal to Prout's Neck was not out of keeping with his personality. Moreover, as Gould has pointed out, Homer deliberately chose to sacrifice a married life for the sake of an artistic one.⁸ With due respect to Goodrich, one can interpret Homer's move to Maine primarily as an attempt to find an environment more conducive to the maturation of his art. There exists no tangible evidence to prove that Homer was anything but content and fulfilled throughout his career in Maine.

An interpretation based solely upon the artist's surface sentiments also fails to consider his inner willpower. A change in his art could possibly reflect a realization of a particular emotional moment or period of distress. On the other hand, the change might result from a broader growth of vision; in Homer's case, an attempt to deal with larger, more profound universal themes than those of such earlier paintings as Long Branch, New Jersey, and High Tide:

The Bathers.

Whatever the motivation, immediate personal factors and environmental change do not fully explain the content of the new theme. I have shown that an intimation of new symbolic content surfaces in the 1880 painting Promenade on the Beach, executed before Homer's departure for Tynemouth. Thus, the change in location acts only as a supportive factor. Moreover, generalizations relying primarily upon subjective conjectures regarding Homer's inner life raise questions and debate. Even if Homer's supposed disappointment in love resulted in the suppression of human emotion, this would still not clearly explain his choice of an overriding symbolic orientation.

Consequently, one must seek a tangible rationale for this powerful symbolic imagery, a justification that accounts for a major change of subject matter and simultaneously translates it into theme and content. Why an artist suddenly alters his subject matter at a specific point in his career is obviously open to constant speculation. How Homer ultimately presents woman as a symbolic counterpart to the sea finds an interpretative substantiation through literary references and comparisons. Homer, for some basic personal reason, pursued the symbolic subject matter constituting the sea as a life-source spiritually linked to woman as the human mother. This choice could undeniably derive from Homer's inventive mind. However, it is entirely credible that Homer's increasingly profound art reflects ideas gathered through his reading. Homer possessed an extensive personal library and its contents might serve as sources for the

symbolism in his mature art. His well-read books contain references to the metaphysical relevance of woman to the sea, an ancient belief consistently emphasized in nineteenth-century literature. Also, certain philosophical writings on his shelves register the alliance of transcendentalism and natural science.

By way of emphasis, Homer's symbolism can be condensed into a statement of woman as earth-mother and life-source in spiritual communication with the sea, the ultimate source of life on earth. This statement finds its inspiration, not direct translation, from the nineteenth-century writings allying transcendentalism and natural science. In these writings three strains appear which combine to produce Homer's symbolic approach to woman and the sea: (a) woman as the progenitor of the human race; (b) the evolutionary concept of the sea as the initial region of animal existence; (c) woman and nature in transcendental communication. All three components combined evoke woman as the human mother, spiritually allied to the sea. Homer's art reflects this totality and not the individual parts. The individual strains thus inspire Homer's metaphoric image of woman, and substantiate the very existence of any such metaphor.

This study will first examine the contents of Homer's library as a compact collection of these three separate ideas. The 1893 painting The Gale will be explored in order to systematically demonstrate the presence of these ideas in Homer's literary references. Afterwards, discussion of Homer's paintings of woman during his mature period will demonstrate his translation of these ideas

into his metaphoric woman image. The literary references which most closely coincide in theme will accompany each painting. Final proof of symbolic intent and philosophical source will appear in Homer's direct literal translation of the works of a specific poet into his art.

NOTES

¹Goodrich, p. 77.

²Flexner, p. 100.

³Goodrich, p. 57, writes: "His antisocial traits had been growing with the years, and were doubtless intensified by his unhappy love affair. . . . At Gloucester and Tynemouth he had a taste of such isolation and relished it. He must have realized that he stood on the threshold of his greatest development as an artist. He knew now what he cared for most--the wild and elemental in nature, the things least touched by man--the sea, the forest, the mountains. And he knew how he must live in order to paint these things."

⁴Donelson F. Hoopes, Winslow Homer Watercolors (New York: Watson Guptill Publications, 1969), p. 16.

⁵Goodrich, p. 56.

⁶Ibid., p. 146.

⁷Ingalls, p. 21.

⁸Gould, pp. 149-151.

CHAPTER III

LITERARY SOURCES OF HOMER'S METAPHOR

The contents of Homer's library are extensive and may at first appear to have no underlying connections. The works of Shelley, Byron, Cowper, Goethe, Longfellow, Whittier, Emerson, Whitman and Carlyle figure prominently in this collection. Homer's special interest in German literature shows in his possession of several histories of that subject: German Literature by James K. Hosmer, largely devoted to Kant, Fichte and Schlegel, German Literature by Spense Carlyle, and Frederick Schlegel's Lectures on the History of Literature. They all represent a nineteenth-century outlook toward nature in which transcendentalism and current trends in science reconcile. The unifying and underlying current throughout these authors flows from German transcendentalism, a philosophical movement that not only shaped the English poets' concept of nature, but was of fundamental significance to mid-nineteenth century American literature. Joseph Beach, in The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry explains the significance of the dissemination of German philosophy. He points out that the appearance of

Schelling's treatise on the world-soul, Von der Weltseele strengthened any existent transcendental tendencies in English sources, especially Coleridge.¹ In the introductory essay to Von der Weltseele, Schelling takes particular satisfaction in conceiving nature as a single unified whole, in which God is everywhere present as "one in this totality." Then, in "Eins und Alles," Goethe addresses himself to the world-soul, perhaps influenced by the title of Schelling's volumes.² In progression, Emerson's nature poems, such as "Each and All" and "The World-Soul," contain frequent suggestions of Goethe's titles, "Eins und Alles," "Dauer im Wechsel," and "Weltseele."³ But often times the Scottish writer Carlyle acquainted Americans with German thought. As Beach readily acknowledges, Carlyle passed on in popular form to American poets certain elements from the thought of Goethe and the German transcendental philosophers.⁴

Whatever the connections, the basic ideas of German transcendentalism were adopted by British authors, and subsequently assimilated directly or through English sources by American authors, especially Emerson, whose influence on subsequent American writers, such as Whitman and Thoreau, cannot be disputed.

German thought combined this transcendental attitude toward nature with a respect for science, more specifically toward the concept of evolution. Accommodation of both the spiritual and the scientific outlook toward nature in nineteenth-century philosophy provided the inspiration for Homer's symbolic relationship of woman and the sea. Henry Hayden Clark, in an article entitled "Emerson and

Science" proves Emerson's acceptance of the doctrine of evolution through his reading of evolutionary philosophers such as Leibnitz, Kant, Goethe, Coleridge and evolutionary scientists such as Linnaeus, Buffon, Cuvier, Hunter, Lamarck, Lyell, Asa Gray, Agassiz and Charles Darwin.⁵

Even Homer's outwardly scientific readings reflect the alliance of physical science and the spiritual. Homer shows his interest in evolution through his possession of Charles Darwin's complete works. Yet, his reading material also includes Natural Law in the Spiritual World by Henry Drummond and Lectures on the Science of Human Life by Sylvester Graham. These two books reflect the current concern for a reconciliation between science and religion, allowing the spiritual to contain a transcendental philosophy of nature.

Drummond's introduction summarizes his thesis and reflects the nineteenth-century attitude toward nature which will profoundly influence Homer's symbolism:

What is required, therefore, to draw Science and religion together again--for they began the centuries hand in hand--is the disclosure of the naturalness of the supernatural. Then, and not till then, will men see how true it is, that to be loyal to all of Nature, they must be loyal to the part defined as Spiritual. No science contributes to another without receiving a reciprocal benefit. And even as the contribution of Science to Religion is the vindication of the naturalness of the Supernatural, so the gift of Religion to Science is the demonstration of the supernaturalness of the Natural. Thus as the Supernatural becomes slowly Natural, will also the Natural become slowly Supernatural until in the impersonal authority of Law men everywhere recognize the

Authority of God. 6

Drummond subsequently specifies what he means by the broad term "Science":

Evolution being found in so many sciences, the likelihood is that it is a universal principle. And there is no presumption whatsoever against this Law and many others being excluded from the domain of the spiritual life. 7

Moreover, Drummond's idea of what the "spiritual" involves bears a distinct flavor of transcendentalism, which Drummond evokes through quotation of Emerson's statement: "Other world! There is no other world. God is one and omnipresent; here or nowhere is the whole fact."⁸

Sylvester Graham's Lectures on the Science of Human Life exemplifies a similar combination of science and religion, or transcendentalism and evolution. Graham acknowledges the possibility of evolution:

Pure limpid water alone, with the surrounding atmosphere, and light and heat and electricity, contains amply sufficient material for all the purposes of nature in the magnificent architecture of our world of things. 9

Yet, in his reconciliation with the spiritual, he qualifies this positivism:

Men, in the gloomy, or the sensual darkness of their minds, and in the temerity of indomitable pride, may speculate as they will, but sound

philosophy and the truth of science pause on the confines of the inorganic world, and are compelled to acknowledge the necessity of an intelligent and designing Omnipotence, to super-induce new laws of action and arrangement. . . .10

Hence, a general survey reveals that the contents of Homer's reading collection have underlying connections. Homer directs his interests toward those authors and scientific pioneers who combine the spiritual forces of nature and the physical forces of evolution. The painting The Gale will demonstrate the presence of these two strains in these literary works in addition to the presence of a third idea--woman as the progenitor of the human race.

The Gale (Fig. 29) of 1883-1893 is an adaptation of an 1883 painting called Coming Away of the Gale (Fig. 30). Homer painted over the original version eliminating a dory and rescue station on the left, and changing the light background of sky to a dark angry sea. These alterations reveal most clearly a conscious motivation of the artist. In the 1893 version, the woman's arm now lies along the horizon. She is in compositional alignment with the sea, and her strong arm and stance convey her challenging strength. Moreover, Homer extends the surging sea to her right foot while the other foot remains untouched, a subtle indication of the relationship between the two as creative sources of life. Also, the flip of her apron arches in conjunction with the waves themselves. Homer wipes away all signs of human habitation and she moves alone and unprotected amidst the sea and the wind. Not diminished or even threatened by them, she is a force equal to their strength; her strong stance and

bracing arm confront the power of the waves smashing upon the rocks. Her face, resolute, betrays no fear, only determination. This determination contrasts with the terrified expression of the youngster upon her back, a reminder of her own creativity as originator and supporter of life. It seems well-founded that she is challenging the sea on her own ground and merit. She can approximate its power, as the artist implies by relating her compositionally to the sea.

An interpretation of the painting's content, through such a relationship of woman and the sea, finds corroboration in the prevalence of the three current concepts in his reading: woman as a life source, the sea as evolutionary source of life, and the union of the two by means of romantic theory. The development of these concepts by the major authors of Homer's readings, namely Byron, Longfellow, Emerson, Whitman, and Goethe, relate in content to The Gale. Poetry by Shelley, as will be discussed later, parallels still other Homer paintings in his choice of imagery and thematic titles.

Regarding Byron, the major triad of nature philosophy can be found in his epic poem "Childe Harold." In a description of the sea, not unlike its melodramatic depiction in The Gale, Byron sees it as divine, as a producer of life:

Thou glorious mirror, where the Almighty's form
Glasses itself in tempests; in all time,
Calm or convulsed--in breeze, or gale, or storm,
Icing the pole, or in the torrid clime
Dark--heaving; boundless, endless, and sublime--
The image of Eternity--the throne

Of the Invisible; even from out thy slime
 The monsters of the deep are made; each
 zone
 Obeys thee; thou goest forth, dread,
 fathomless, alone. 11

Likewise, although he does not address woman as the mother of the human race, he alludes to "Mother-Earth." Stanza 37 of "Childe Harold" releases this image:

Dear Nature is the kindest mother still,
 Though always changing, in her aspect mild;
 From her bare bosom let me take my fill,
 Her never-wean'd, though not her
 favor'd child. (p. 30)

Also, in "Manfred":

. . . My mother Earth.
 And thou fresh breaking Day, and
 you, ye Mountains,
 Why are Ye beautiful? I cannot love ye. (p. 189)

Byron likewise in "Manfred" describes the ocean in female terms:

And I have loved thee, Ocean! and my joy
 Of youthful sports was on thy breast
 to be
 Borne, like the bubbles, onward. . . . (p. 71)

Byron does not explicitly relate woman and the sea as two comparable life sources. However, in "Childe Harold" he does maintain the transcendental nature of the universe and in this manner he allies the two sources:

I live not in myself, but I become
 Portion of that around me; and to me

High mountains are a feeling, but the hum
 Of human cities torture; I can see
 Nothing to loathe in nature, save to be
 A link reluctant in a fleshy chain,
 Class'd among creatures, when the
 soul can flee,
 And with the sky, the peak, the heaving plain
 Of ocean, or the stars, mingle, and not in vain. (p. 46)

The same respect toward nature as mother and toward the sea as a life-giving force appears in the writings of Goethe and Carlyle. It appears likely that Goethe was an early proponent of evolution, championing the evolutionary views of Geoffrey de Saint-Hilaire. The poem "The Metamorphosis of Plants" points in this direction. It relates the transformation of the leaf into the other organs of the plant, culminating in the flower and fruit. It would be misleading to conclude that Goethe here anticipates the theory of the origin of the species. However, as Joseph Beach concludes, "his whole conception implies a comprehensive evolutionary philosophy which requires only the Darwinian hypothesis to give it substance and convincingness."¹² Emerson later acknowledges Goethe's evolutionary implications by quoting Goethe's doctrine: "as the tapeworm, the caterpillar, goes from knot to knot and closes with the head, so man and the higher animals are built up through the vertebrae, the powers concentrated in the head."¹³

Goethe's well-known adoption of the transcendental or spiritual view toward nature provides an example of physical science tempered by the spiritual, an outlook on nature that contributes to the special relationship between woman and the sea in The Gale.

According to Goethe:

All members form themselves according to eternal laws, and the rarest form preserves in secret the primitive type. The form determines the animal's mode of life, while reciprocally, the mode of life reacts powerfully on all forms. . . . What kind of God were he who impelled things only from outside, and let the universe twirl round his finger? God moves the world inwardly, cherishes nature in himself, himself in nature, and as it exists in him never misses his power nor his spirit. 14

That Goethe attributed to the sea a definite role in the life process is made clear by Miss E. M. Butler in her essay on Goethe and Byron. She states:

He became fascinated by it (the sea), glorifying it both in "Pandora" and in the third act of "Faust II" as the great life-giving and regenerating element whose tang you can almost smell in the wonderful sea piece the "Classical Witches' Sabbath." 15

In a decidedly more romantic tone, Carlyle describes nature in maternal terms, a description with which the infant in The Gale would certainly agree:

He gazed over these stupendous masses with wonder, almost with longing desire's never till this hour had he known Nature, that she was One, that she was his Mother and divine. 16

Moreover, he explicitly expresses a transcendentalist attitude toward nature:

So that this so solid-seeming world after all,

were but an air-image, our ME the only reality!
 and Nature, with its thousand-fold production
 and destruction, but the reflex of our inward
 force, the "phantasy of our Dream" . . . 17

Turning to the American writers, it seems matter of course that Longfellow appears in Homer's reading collection. After all, Longfellow was born in Portland, Maine, about four miles from Prout's Neck. As the representative New England poet he would surely occupy a place in Homer's collection. But, his significance owes to more than mere geographic proximity. Longfellow too belongs with those nineteenth-century nature poets who look to the sea as a life source in relation to the human mother. Among a number of translations by Longfellow is the following poem:

The Wave

From the German of Tiedge
 "Whither, thou turbid wave?
 Whither, with so much haste,
 As if a thief went thou?"

"I am the Wave of Life,
 Stained with my margin's dust;
 From the struggle and the strife
 Of the narrow stream I fly
 To the Sea's immensity,
 To wash from me the slime
 Of the muddy banks of Time!" 18

It matters little that Longfellow himself did not write this verse. It's inclusion among his own poems indicates that it held some special significance for the poet, that it expressed an outlook similar to his own. This notion of the sea as life subsequently appears in his own works. In "The Secret of the Sea" he personifies

the sea as a beating heart:

Till my soul is full of longing
 For the secret of the sea
 And the heart of the great ocean
 Sends a thrilling pulse through me. (p. 127)

He might as well have been describing the intimate relationship between the woman and the sea in The Gale; for as I have pointed out, she is tied in her peculiar posture to the horizon line and the foaming surf, not to mention the fact that her gaze reflects the "longing" and emotional intensity written of by Longfellow. The poet makes the concrete visual connection in the last two verses of the poem "Twilight":

What tale do the roaring ocean,
 And the night wind, bleak and wild,
 As they beat at the crazy casement,
 Tell to that little child?

And why do the roaring ocean,
 And the night-wind, wild and bleak,
 As they beat at the heart of the mother,
 Drive the color from her cheek? (p. 127)

Emerson, the premier transcendentalist among American nineteenth-century writers, hints at a similar relationship between woman and the forces of nature. In Miscellanies he alludes to the intuitive powers of woman:

There is much in their nature, much in their social position which gives them a certain power of divination and women know, at first sight, the characters of those with whom they converse. There is much to give them a religious height which men do not attain. . . . 19

This "religious height," this spirituality possessed by women, ultimately separates men from women in Homer's paintings. The woman of The Gale, the epitomy of this spirituality, thus serves as a most effective contrast to Homer's male figures who are nothing more than "huddled forms, anonymous in their oil skins."

Emerson, moreover, when speaking about nature, uses the feminine gender which identifies it with woman more intimately. In his essay Nature he writes:

I have no hostility to nature, but a child's love to it. I expand and live in the warm day like corn and melons. Let us speak her fair. I do not wish to fling stones at my beautiful mother, nor soil my gentle nest. 20

In Natural History of Intellect:

silent, passive, even sulkily, Nature offers every morning her wealth to man. She is immensely rich; he is welcome to her entire goods, but she speaks no word, will not so much as beckon or cough. 21

More specifically, he views the ocean itself as the evolutionary cradle of life, so that transcendentalism and physical science are linked.²² In an 1833 lecture he says:

His [man's] limbs are only a more exquisit organization--say rather the finish--of the rudimental forms that have been already sweeping the sea and creeping in the mud: the brother of his hand is even now cleaving the Arctic Sea in the fin of the whale, and innumerable ages since was pawing the marsh in the flipper of the saurian. 23

And in Natural History of Intellect:

What strength and fecundity, from the sea-monsters, hugest of animals, to the primary forms of which it [the Atlantic Ocean] is the immense cradle, and the phosphorent infusories; it is one vast rolling bed of life, and every sparkle is a fish. 24

Therefore, with Emerson's view of the sea as source of life, nature as feminine, and woman's special intuitive powers in communication with nature, it is only one more step to Homer's painting The Gale, where the woman with the child on her back is supernaturally allied with the sea of life.

These ideas advanced by Emerson are expanded more fully by Whitman, heir to not only Emerson's views, but German and English ones as well. Likewise, Whitman depicts both woman and the sea as sources of life; more specifically, the sea becomes "a husky old mother" with woman as a spiritual counterpart.

In the poem "The World Below the Brine" Whitman explicitly affirms his belief in the evolutionary process originating in the sea. He observes the correct order of life, progressing from vegetable to animal life, and generally from simple to more complex organisms. Finally in the last few lines he subtly suggests man's derivation from this aqueous life:

Passions there, wars, pursuits, tribes,
 sight in those ocean-depths,
 breathing air, as so many do,
 The change thence to the sight here, and
 to the subtle air breathed by
 beings like us who walk this
 sphere,
 The change onward from ours to that
 of beings who walk other spheres. 25

This view of the sea as life's ultimate source is juxtaposed by his view of woman as the source of the human race at large. Helen Abbot Michael, in Studies in Plant and Organic Chemistry and Literary Papers (1907), comments upon the role of woman in Whitman's poetry:

Woman considered as the mother of great intellectual and spiritual progeny, the giver out of the fluid of true life. A mother for humanity verily; in this sense the human motherhood of Whitman is impressive, she exists for the race at large. 26

This quote by Michael and the following words of Whitman himself indeed describe the larger symbolic role of earth-mother assumed by Homer's monumental figure of the mother with her child in The Gale. In "I Sing the Body Electric," Whitman states:

This the nucleus-after the child is
born of woman, man is born of woman,
This the bath of birth, this the merge
of small and large, and the outlet again.

Be not ashamed woman, your privelege
encloses the rest, and is the
exit of the rest,
You are the gates of the body, and
you are the gates of the soul.

The female contains all qualities and
tempers them,
She is in her place and moves
with perfect balance,
She is all things duly veil'd, she
is both passive and active,
She is to conceive daughters as well
as sons, and sons as well as daughters.

As I see my soul reflected in Nature,

As I see through a mist, One with
 inexpressible completeness,
 sanity, beauty,
 See the bent head and arms
 folded over the breast, the
 Female I see. (p. 97)

Moreover, this last verse infers the special relationship that woman as mother enjoys with Nature in general, the relationship that Homer's figure enjoys with the sea. Whitman likewise qualifies the term Nature, establishing woman's relationship as closest with the sea. He establishes a close psychological intimacy of the two through a likening of the sea to a mother. The sea therefore becomes that part of nature which woman in her maternity intuitively understands, for not only is the sea the source of life, but in feminine terms she is a "mother." The two thereby become intrinsically allied.

"On the Beach at Night Alone," a poem whose title might equally serve for that of The Gale, opens with the lines: "On the beach at night alone, / As the old mother sways her to / and fro singing her husky song. . . ." (p. 260). Then, in "Song for All Seas, All Ships," Whitman explicitly asserts the sea's femininity:

Thou sea that pickest and cullest
 the race in time, and unitest
 nations.
 Suckled by thee, old husky nurse,
 embodying thee,
 Indomitable, untamed as thee. (p. 262)

Hence, Whitman accomplishes the identification of woman with the sea and through his words paints a visual image of The Gale.

Whitman completes the alliance of transcendentalism and

evolution through woman's role in the vast scheme of Nature that preoccupies American, English and German writers, and which supports a symbolic interpretation of The Gale. Analysis of the form and content has supported this symbolic interpretation, and so too, analysis of the writers familiar to Homer has revealed the elements necessary to the formation of such symbolism. The validation of this symbolism now allows for its further investigation through paintings of Homer's mature period. Literary references will further support Homer's source and metaphoric intent.

NOTES

¹Joseph Warren Beach, The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry (New York: Macmillan Company, 1936), pp. 90-100.

²Ibid., p. 51.

³Ibid., p. 346.

⁴Ibid., p. 301.

⁵Henry Gayden Clark, "Emerson and Science," Philological Quarterly, 10, No. 3 (July 1931), pp. 225-60.

⁶Henry Drummond, Natural Law in the Spiritual World (New York: James Pott and Company, 1884), p. xxii.

⁷Ibid., p. 37.

⁸Ibid., p. 232.

⁹Sylvester Graham, Lectures on the Science of Human Life (Boston: Marsh, Capen, Lyon and Webb, 1839), p. 57.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 63.

¹¹The Poetical Works of Lord Byron (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1878), p. 71. Hereafter references to this work will appear in the text by page number.

¹²Beach, p. 294.

¹³As quoted by Clark, p. 244.

¹⁴As quoted by Clark, p. 245.

¹⁵Eliza Marian Butler, Byron and Goethe (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1956), p. 15.

¹⁶As quoted by Beach, p. 301.

¹⁷As quoted by Beach, p. 303.

¹⁸The Poetical Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (Boston: James P. Osgood and Company, 1878), p. 22. Hereafter references to this work will appear in the text by page number.

¹⁹The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1903-1904), xi, p. 414.

²⁰The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, I, p. 63.

²¹Ibid., xii, p. 28.

²²For a fuller account see Clark, "Emerson and Science," pp. 225-60.

²³As quoted by Clark, p. 244.

²⁴The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, xii, pp. 153-154.

²⁵Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass, ed. Harold W. Blodgett and Sculley Bradley (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1965), p. 260. Hereafter references to this work will appear in the text by page number.

²⁶Helen Abbot Michael, Studies in Plant and Organic Chemistry and Literary Papers (Cambridge, 1907), p. 373.

CHAPTER IV

WOMAN AND THE SEA IN HOMER'S MATURE ART

The 1881 painting Perils of the Sea (Fig. 31) shows two women standing on a pier, their forms silhouetted against the sky and sea. This watercolor appears to have been inspired by the same storm depicted in the foregoing composition of Watching the Tempest of 1881 (Fig. 32). "The entire community of a coast settlement has turned out to watch a wreck off shore," says the descriptive catalogue of the Clarke collection. "On a pier in the foreground two women stand in attitudes expressive of intense and anxious attention. Below the pier, on the beach, many figures crowd with all eyes bent upon the ragings of a wintry surface."¹ At the left is an observatory for the use of the coast-guard. The painting was originally entitled "Forebodings," implying that the artist intended to convey not only an actual event, but also a psychological drama. The figures of the two women, due to their size and placement as a focal point in the composition, attract greater attention than those of the men below the pier. Moreover, their behavior distinguishes them from the male participants of the scene. The women just look out to

sea. Most significantly, their gaze is not in the direction of whatever "peril" to which the men are pointing. While the men are presumably planning their technical course of action, the women's thoughts inhabit another realm. They possess some higher wisdom of the sea, some affinity with it not displayed by the men. Through this keener sense, they see the "forebodings" that Homer intended. Whitman appropriately describes such a look of understanding and fear in "Pensive on Her Dead Gazing":

Pensive on her dead gazing I heard the Mother
of All,
Desperate on the torn bodies, on the forms
covering the battlefield gazing,
(As the last gun ceased, but the scent of
the powder-smoke linger'd,)
As she call'd to her earth with mournful
voice while she stalk'd,
Absorb them well O my earth, she cried, I
charge you lose not my sons, lose
not an atom. . . . (p. 498)

This feeling of strength and forbearance in the "Mother of All" appears in the bodies of Homer's women who, in their strength and stalwart nature, are human counterparts to the sea.

Such strength is extremely evident in the women of Hark! the Lark of 1883 (Fig. 33), which presents once more this sense of woman's spiritual alliance with nature, in this instance, the song of a lark. Without being aware of the subject the viewer senses such a communion. The intensity of their upward gaze, the depth in their eyes, and the captured stillness of the moment, reinforce the spectator's initial impression. This supernatural communication

with nature parallels Emerson's description of women in Miscellanies:

There is much that tends to give them a religious height which men do not attain . . . in the Mohammedan faith, Woman yet occupies the same leading position, as a prophetess, that she has among the ancient Greeks, or among the Hebrews, or among the Saxons. This power, this religious character, is everywhere to be remarked in them. 2

Upon further examination other evidence of their bond with nature arises. These three women conform to the environment which they inhabit; like nature they are physically hardy and strong. In fact, their arms are so large they appear distorted. Betrayed by the rolled-up shirt sleeves, these are manly arms conditioned by hard physical labor. Homer's compositional play of silhouetting their ruddy faces against the sky adds further subtle reinforcement of their ties to nature. Like the distant sea and the song of the lark they represent basic elemental nature. They become earth mothers, strong as nature itself, yet sensitive to the call of its wild creatures.

This sensitivity gains further emphasis in the 1882 drawing Flamborough Head (Fig. 34). Once again this woman reveals the strength and forbearance which Homer so admired in the Tynemouth women. Once again she stands in a strong relationship with the sea, upon which she directs her gaze. The viewer, without too much conjecture, can detect a scolding reproach on her face, perhaps aimed at the sea for some "stunt" it may have pulled. In Whitman's "Song of Myself":

Howler and scooper of storms, capricious
 and dainty sea,
 I am integral with you, I too am
 of one phase and of all phases. (p. 50)

The woman assumes a matronly attitude toward the sea. Easily recognizable is Homer's association of her straight, stalwart figure with the curving vertical lines of the cliffs which are repeated in the easy flow of her dress. The cliffs march rhythmically toward her and she becomes the fourth element in this compositional repetition. Like these stone walls, she represents a strong opposing force which the sea meets every day in a waging battle. Yet, she also towers above these cliffs, her head boldly silhouetted against the sky; for unlike these inanimate walls, she is the human counterpart to the living sea.

The Bathers (Fig. 35), of the same year, exhibits a quite novel compositional approach. Homer shows two girls, in close-up view, frolicking in the water. Ostensibly there is no enigmatic content. The painting's profundity lies in Homer's cogent use of the composition to underscore the girls' affinity with the sea. They are entirely at home in the water. Their forms appear as a mere extension of it, from which they grow quite naturally as if organically united as one. Homer will make use of this idea later when he deals with two grappling women in the painting Undertow.

One also sees the thematic importance of cogent composition in the 1883 watercolor Inside the Bar. The wind catches the woman's dress into a shape reiterating the shape of the billowing sails of

the boat. She is the fulcrum of the painting to which Homer directs the strongest light. He ties her compositionally to the sea and sky against which he places her figure in bold relief, and at the same time he roots her to the solid rocks of the earth. Homer's subtle positioning of one foot on the earth, the other touching the water, symbolizes the role of human mother, tied intrinsically with the sea, another life source. On a psychological level, she ignores the men who approach the shore in their rowboats. Instead, she gazes beyond them at something outside of the immediate picture space, perhaps only at the sea itself. The men direct their attention to her, a symbol of approaching security. With the light at its strongest around her form, and with the men's gaze focused upon her, she epitomizes an archetype female described by Whitman in "I Sing the Body Electric":

This is the female form,
 A divine nimbus exhales from it from
 head to foot,
 It attracts with fierce undeniable
 attraction,
 I am drawn by its breath as if
 I were no more than a helpless
 vapor, all falls aside but myself and it,
 Books, art, religion, time, the visible and
 solid earth, and what was expected
 of heaven or fear'd of hell, are now
 consumed. . . . (p. 96)

In 1883 Homer returned to Prout's Neck, Maine, to live. He continued painting scenes of the perils of the sea, but more and more he tended toward figureless seascapes. Woman, nonetheless, remains a recurrent theme and her symbolic importance never

diminishes. If anything, the heroic element increases as Homer deals with the perils of the sea on a more close-up basis.

In 1884 he finished the oil painting The Life Line (Fig. 10). According to Lloyd Goodrich, Homer had spent the previous summer in Atlantic City where he made friends with a lifesaving crew and got them to demonstrate the use of breeches buoy in making rescues from wrecks. The Life Line represents an unconscious woman, supported by her rescuer, being pulled to shore amidst the towering waves. Lloyd Goodrich finds this work the most praiseworthy of Homer's career up to that point:

This was his most dramatic painting so far. The Coming Away of the Gale had shown the spectators of a drama which was taking place, so to speak, off-stage; but The Life Line pictured the drama itself. The long rhythm of the breakers, the violent bursts of spray, the precarious movements of the two human beings suspended over this turmoil, the effect of the gale tearing at them and driving the waves, had a force such as he had never attained before.

Even in this most heroic of his works, he had not abandoned the feminine motif, for the main theme was the rescue of a woman and the central element was her unconscious figure. Young and handsome, of his favorite blond type, her robust body fully revealed in her wet, clinging clothes, she was a figure designed to arouse not only pity but admiration. 3

Homer paints a red scarf across the face of the seaman, hiding it entirely. He directs all attention to the woman's dark face which he brings into further focus by the placement of white sea foam directly behind. Although the victim of a shipwreck, she does not

oppose the sea. On the contrary, she seems to be asleep. No feeling of conflict, fear or violence is evoked, only one of peace and rest. Her head lies back amidst the waves and her hand falls down toward the rising water.

The man, on the other hand, is entirely in opposition to the sea. Face hidden by the scarf, he exhibits no spiritual identification with it--he merely engages in the technical mechanics of the operation. In an upright position he clashes with the swaying diagonals of the walls of water, while the woman's reclining posture echoes the curving rhythm of the waves.

In the painting Undertow of 1886 (Fig. 11), a similar spiritual intimacy exists between the women and the sea, and a similar contrast between this intimacy and the technical prowess of the male rescuers. It appears that the larger woman attempted to rescue her companion who threw her arms around her neck and thus impeded the safety of both of them. This larger woman is the only figure of the four in the painting whose face is in full view. She looks up, eyes partially open, with an expression of peace and inner repose. Indeed, she appears to recline on a bed of water in a pose reminiscent of a sea nymph combing her hair. Her figure emerges organically from the water, embodying as it does the life force of the sea. Since she is such a strong counterpart, she does not turn her face away from the wave about to break behind her. In fact, she is tied not only spiritually or symbolically, but compositionally, to the wave in that her bent arm and head lie on the wave's diagonal.

The similarity of Homer's woman to a sea nymph appears to be intentional when contrasted to Cabanel's 1863 painting The Birth of Venus (Fig. 36). Both women, abundant in form, recline at ease on a diagonal line of waves. The symbolic meaning of Venus as the goddess born from the ocean, the elemental life-giving force in Greek mythology, adds impetus to Homer's woman-sea identification. However, unlike Cabanel, Homer's ideal imagery emerges from real situations, a combination of the finite and the infinite. Thus, Homer's woman first remains a realistic human being through which he accomplishes his metaphor.

The men, on the other hand, exhibit none of this intimacy as an equal life force. Both their heads turn aside not only from the wave, but from the woman and also from the viewer of the painting. In this respect Homer discounts any spiritual relationship on the part of the men with the sea. Their role consists only of the sheer mechanical aspects of the rescue. They each grasp the end of some kind of stretcher upon which the women lie, and in this way are prevented from any physical contact with the women themselves. The women therefore exist in a different realm--one of spiritual intimacy with the sea--a realm of which the man can never be a part. This trust and intimacy with the sea as an equal creative life source coincides with Goethe's description:

She has set me here, and she will lead me forth.
 To her I trust myself. She may deal with me (as
 she likes). She will not hate her own handiwork. .
 . . For everything she is to blame, and to her
 must credit be given for everything. 4

Whitman, too, in his comments on himself, sets forth a nearly identical conclusion:

He (Whitman) turns Nature, with its ensembles, always in human relations. It is not only the infinite and relentless Queen, unspeakably mysterious and separate; it is our Mother, holding us with undying ties, affections. Tenderly she gave us birth, is ever ready for us through life, with health, with silence, with consolation; tenderly she receives us at death. 5

This close-up, detailed view of woman that we see in Undertow differs from Homer's sketchy depiction of the woman image in the 1891 painting The West Wind (Fig. 37). The West Wind is remarkable in its simple design of few and telling lines, in which the power of the wind is suggested in forceful style. At the right of the composition the figure of a woman stands with her back turned; as she watches the surf, she attempts to secure her hat buffeted by the strong west wind. Homer condenses everything in the painting into the most succinct and significant form, the figure of the woman little more than a flattened area of color placed against the rising white waves. Yet, the color of her figure belongs to that of the earth, the greenness of her form extends from the green windswept grass, and the darker shading of her underskirt echoes the color of the foreground shrub, which likewise sweeps upward. Homer thereby ties the woman to the earth itself as human progenitor, yet by locating her against the sea, he emphasizes her kinship with it as a comparable, strong, and life-giving force.

This economy of means and placement of small figures as flat

areas of color against the sea occurs also in the 1890 painting A Summer Night (Fig. 38). One of Homer's few nocturnal works, it captures the silvery quality of late evening. William Downes, in Life and Works of Winslow Homer, accepts this picture as a literal transcript of a scene which Homer saw in front of his studio.⁶ This mundane interpretation has been questioned and the painting re-evaluated by Hunter Ingalls:

To appreciate such a painting as A Summer Night as a simple illustration of a charming scene that took place on the Homer household porch is to derive far less content from the work than it actually contains. There is as much earnestness as frivolity in the two girls' pose, while the partial delineation of the foremost girl's buttocks lends a guardedly sensual note to the work. The deeper eeriness of the painting, however, lies in the completely shadowed group of figures who gaze enigmatically out upon the breaking and moon-tracked sea. 7

Indeed, this "completely shadowed group of figures" argues against a mere literal reading of the work, deriving as it does from an earlier 1890 watercolor A Moonlit Sea (Fig. 39). There must be a deeper mystery to this painting than that allowed by a directly recorded pleasant moment. The sea presents a lighted expanse of silver and blue against which a gigantic wave is about to crash. The silhouetted group of people gazing out upon the sea contemplate its power, beauty and infinity, overwhelmed by its unfathomableness. Over and against the distant figures, two women dance on a foreground platform. They are the only two figures painted in any measure of detail, and the woman facing the viewer is the only figure

whose face is visible. They waltz in a rhythm attuned to the sweeping motion of the sea. Compositionally, their flowing skirts echo the curving contours of the breaking wave, while the pyramidal form of their extended arms and interlocked heads recurs in the dark shaded area of the sea directly behind them. They exist as the only animated figures in the painting, and thereby register an affinity with the sea, active in its gentle rolling motion. They reside entirely at ease with the sea, its movement and the lulling music of the breaking surf, an inspiration for their dance.

Walt Whitman's poem "As I Ebb'd With the Ocean of Life" embodies this kinship of figures with the flow of the sea, more specifically the kinship of woman to the sea described as "mother": "Ebb, ocean of life (the flow will return,) / Cease not your meaning you fierce / old mother. . . ." (p. 255).

The paintings by Homer of female figures standing on rocks looking out to sea are numerous in the 1880's and early nineties and repeat the basic composition in such a work as Flamborough Head. Looking Out to Sea (Fig. 40), Sunset, Saco Bay (Fig. 41), The Fisher Girl (Fig. 42), and On the Cliffs (Fig. 43) are several such paintings Homer executed at Prout's Neck. The final painting of woman and one of Homer's most forceful statements of the woman-sea identification is A Light On the Sea of 1897 (Fig. 44). The painting is not a pure seascape, as the title might imply, and moreover, the focus centers upon the woman, not upon the light on the sea. The possibility thereby exists that the title bears some symbolic value.

Light reflects from the water directly behind the fisherwoman while she looks away from the sea. As her body obscures the light source, the subject and content of the painting outdistance the mundane title. Perhaps Homer suggests that the woman is the "light on the sea," that she provides a key to the mystery of the unfathomable sea! Indeed, she is Homer's mature woman, with feet planted firmly on the ground and strong arms in full view, an image of strength welcoming the incoming tide. Whitman aptly describes her appearance in "I Sing the Body Electric":

She too is not only herself, she
 is the teaming mother of
 mothers,
 She is the bearer of them that
 shall grow and be mates
 to the mothers. (p. 99)

In the role of woman as earth-mother, her spiritual alliance with the sea defines the sea as a cradle of life. If Homer intends such a subtle message through the title and composition, the woman achieves an even greater identity with the sea than before. Now, the title does not designate her presence, but assumes it to be there. In other words, by making no literal reference to her in the title, Homer endows her with greater thematic significance.

The practice of understated labeling is not restricted to this painting, but advances as an underlying trend in many other Homer paintings. For the most part, the titles of the paintings of women and the sea refer to infinite nature rather than to the finite human element. A few examples are: The Gale, Perils of the Sea, Flamborough

Head, West Wind, Hark! the Lark, Undertow, A Summer Night, Early Evening (Fig. 45), Sunset, Saco Bay and Light on the Sea. The paintings of men, on the other hand, refer to a physical reality or immediate human activity, such as The Fog Warning, Eight Bells, The Lookout-"All's Well" (Fig. 46), The Herring Net (Fig. 47), and The Dory (Fig. 48). The men, therefore, do not figure in the titles, but are assumed part of the physical or technical realities of the daily struggle with the sea. Extending the analogy, woman appears as the central element in paintings whose titles express seascapes in which she is synonymous with nature itself. Her role, in contrast to the physical one of the men's, is spiritual. She is in spiritual alliance with the sea as an equivalent life force.

NOTES

¹As quoted by William Howe Downes, The Life and Works of Winslow Homer (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911), p. 101.

²The Complete Works of Emerson, xi, p. 414.

³Goodrich, pp. 86-7.

⁴As quoted by Beach, p. 278.

⁵As quoted by Beach, p. 129.

⁶According to Downes, p. 160, "the platform is the only part of the composition which did not exist in the real scene. The girls were dancing on the lawn. As usual, the artist painted exactly what he saw. The group silhouetted at the right, on the rocks, was composed of a number of young people belonging to the summer colony, and included several of the Homers."

⁷Ingalls, p. 21.

CHAPTER V

SHELLEY AS A SOURCE FOR HOMER'S METAPHORIC IMAGE

This identification of woman with the sea as a creative life source appears throughout Homer's mature period. Shaped by his readings of nineteenth-century literature, this metaphor derives from Homer's personal application of the concepts of evolution, transcendentalism, and woman's role in nature. Homer does not translate these concepts point by point, yet thematic parallels do stand. The literature thus substantiates the existence and meaning of Homer's symbolism. In the case of Shelley, however, thematic parallels change into direct literal ties of literature to art. In this way, Shelley provides the ultimate interpretative substantiation of Homer's image of woman. First, investigation will show that Shelley's poetry expresses the same alliance of transcendentalism and science as that exhibited in Homer's other readings. This unity supports my theory that Homer consciously fused nineteenth-century ideas toward woman and nature into a personal statement. Second, comparison of poems and paintings will show that Homer directly incorporates certain Shelley poems into his art, so that the

relationship between art and literature becomes causal rather than merely parallel. Thus, a direct connection exists between Shelley's poetry and Homer's symbolic pictorial statement.

Joseph Beach summarizes Shelley's approach to nature in poetry, an approach that corresponds to Homer's:

In a sense, however, he is more of a nature-poet. . . he readily passes beyond the visible shows of nature to the larger cosmic operations in which she manifests her power and direction. . . . He is more prone to dwell on the forces and processes--electricity, gravity, light, heat, chemical force, vegetation--by which nature is constituted an entity for scientist and mathematician. . . . In the esthetic synthesis of universal nature with individual beauteous forms, the element of scientific theory is greater and more constant, though Shelley's symbolism often requires a gloss. And in a larger proportion of cases, the word nature with him obviously refers to the philosophical abstraction. 1

This description by Beach of Shelley's attitude toward nature implicitly suggests not only Shelley's understanding of physical science but an interest in "transcendental" or "philosophical abstraction," and a projection of nature into feminine images or "beauteous forms."

The adoption of the doctrine of evolution, the sea as the ultimate source of life, is less obvious in Shelley than in Homer's other literary references. Joseph Beach has concluded, however, that Shelley's Asia figure in "Prometheus Unbound" consciously derives from Erasmus Darwin's "Dione" in The Temple of Nature and like Dione stands for the evolution of organic life in the ocean.² Aside from

this inference, more tangible references to evolution do appear in Shelley's writings suggesting the sea as a life source. In "Queen Mab" he alludes frequently to a "chain of being" and "necessity" as the law of nature. The most explicit statement appears in his notes following "Queen Mab" where he states:

He who asserts the doctrine of necessity means that, contemplating the events which compose the moral and material universe, he beholds only an immense and uninterrupted chain of causes and effects, no one of which could occupy any other place than it does act. 3

It is apparent that Shelley knew evolutionary theory, and also that he considered the ocean a primal force. His description of the ocean in the opening lines of "Time" conveys this outlook and corresponds to the mood of the women studied in Homer's watercolor Perils of the Sea:

Unfathomable Sea! whose waves are years,
Ocean of Time, whose waters of deep woe
Are brackish with the salt of human
tears!
Thou shoreless flood, which in thy
ebb and flow
Claspest the limits of mortality! (p. 569)

The corollary of woman as progenitor, a source of life comparable to the sea, finds equal expression. Shelley employs the metaphor in reference to nature as a whole, calling earth itself "mother." This is evident in the title of his poem "Homer's Hymn to the Earth: Mother of All," and appears in the opening lines of "Alastor":

Earth, ocean, air, beloved brotherhood!
 If our great Mother has imbued my soul
 With aught of natural piety to feel
 Your love, and recompense the boon with
 moon; (p. 81)

The final alliance of earth and the sea by Shelley occurs in his statement of the unity of man with nature in "The Revolt of Islam":

. . . All living things a common
 nature own,
 And thought erect an universal
 throne,
 Where many shapes one tribute
 ever bear?
 And Earth, their mutual mother,
 does She groan
 To see her sons contend? (p. 184)

In this alliance of the earth as mother with the sea as source of life Shelley shares in the harmonious union of transcendentalism and physical science expressed by Goethe, Carlyle, Byron, Longfellow, Emerson and Whitman. This coherence among Homer's literary interests supports my belief that it was their common attitude toward nature which interested Homer, and from which he formed his own statement. Homer's direct translation of Shelley's poetry into art strengthens this belief, and likewise reinforces the symbolic meaning of the woman image.

Homer translates the titles of Shelley's poems into titles of his paintings. Moreover, the content of poem and painting relate to each other, although one cannot prove whether Homer executed the paintings as visual counterparts to the poetry, or whether he merely

appended the titles upon detecting the similarity in content.

The 1881 watercolor Perils of the Sea, originally entitled "Forebodings," suggests that the focus is not upon the men's rescue operations, but upon the sense of apprehension or "peril" in the faces of the two young women as they gaze out to sea. In 1819, Shelley wrote a poem called "Fragment: Forebodings." Its title and content correspond with Homer's painting:

Fragment: Forebodings

Is not today enough? Why do I peer
 Into the darkness of the day to come?
 Is not tomorrow even as yesterday?
 And will the day that follows change thy doom?
 Few flowers grow upon the wintry way;
 And who waits for thee in that cheerless
 home
 Whence thou hast fled, whither thou must return
 Charged with the load that makes thee
 faint and mourn? (p. 531)

Like the poem, Homer's painting depicts two women on the land-
 ing "peering into the darkness of the day" as the men pursue their
 activities. The second title "Perils of the Sea" indicates that
 some mishap has occurred or is about to occur. This knowledge of
 the never-ending possibility of death surfaces upon their faces as
 they perhaps speculate "will the day that follows change thy doom?"
 Moreover, the theme of women waiting for the return of their men
 bearing ill-tidings of disaster exemplifies the last three lines
 of the verse.

This reference of a painting to a poem is not an isolated ex-
 ample or mere coincidence. The use of identical imagery and title

occurs repeatedly in Shelley's poetry and Homer's art, establishing a pattern which should not be ignored. For instance, Homer incorporates Shelley's poem "To a Skylark" into his 1883 painting Hark! the Lark. He considered this painting his best achievement to date, and the following year painted a watercolor replica, A Voice from the Cliffs (Fig. 49).⁴ In this later version the three women stand beside the sea upon which appears a boat, but they direct their gaze upward toward the implied cliff. In Hark! the Lark the same three figures stand in a field; no water or ship appear in the composition. The women gaze intently upward into space. As the title indicates, their concentration rests upon a lark in the sky, although the lark itself is not visible. The change in title and composition reflects a conscious choice made by the artist on the basis of content. This new title and content approximate more precisely Shelley's poem "To a Skylark," in which certain key passages reveal an obvious affinity between poem and painting. The verse opens with the line: "Hail to thee, blithe spirit," thus bearing the same exclamatory quality as the title of Homer's painting. The poem then proceeds to describe the flight of the lark as it soars through the blue sky. As Homer's figures recognize the cry of the lark, so too the poet acknowledges the call:

In the broad daylight
Though art unseen, but yet I hear thy
shrill delight. . . .

All the earth and air
With thy voice is loud. (p. 545)

Moreover, as in the poem, the lark does not appear in the painting; but Homer implies its presence by the glance of the women.

What possibly attracted Homer to this poem is the supernatural connection of man with nature. The poet envies the gladness of natural creatures who are free from "hate, pride, and fear" which sadden and cloud the spirit of man. Shelley addresses the lark:

Teach me half the gladness
That thy brain must know,
Such harmonious madness
From my lips would flow,
The world should listen then, as I am
listening now. (p. 545)

This appeal to nature by Shelley and a similar alliance with nature by Homer's archetype woman figure occurs in the 1819 poem "Ode to the West Wind" and the 1892 painting West Wind. In this picture the lone woman, like the grass in the field, bends in the strong wind as she attempts to steady herself and secure her hat. Her form assumes an abstract quality as though she grows from the earth. She becomes an extension of the greenness of the field, a form as shapeless, as intangible. Likewise, the poem stresses this driving force of a strong wind in the words, "Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere." There is an alliance of earth and sea as they both exhibit the effects of the roaring wind. Shelley footnotes the third stanza:

The phenomenon alluded to at the conclusion of the third stanza is well known to the naturalists. The vegetation at the bottom of the sea, of rivers

and lakes, sympathises with that of the land in the change of seasons, and is consequently influenced by the winds which announce it. (p. 526)

In effect, the alliance of earth and sea becomes one of woman and the sea in Homer's painting where the woman identifies with earth. Shelley further emphasizes woman as earth, or nature, when the speaker begs the west wind to become his own spirit and spread his words among mankind:

Be through my lips to unawakened earth
The trumpet of a prophecy! O, wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far
behind? (p. 527)

Painting and poem in combination, the woman as nature assumes the prophetic role which appears in Homer's other paintings of the period.

Homer does not directly convert the Shelley title "A Vision of the Sea" into the title of a painting. Nevertheless, it does contain certain images and phrases which anticipate the subject matter and titles of several paintings. The poem narrates the destruction of a ship at sea by a storm. Only a mother and child survive the disaster and they sit at the helm awaiting the arrival of a rescue vessel.

Shelley opens with the lines:

'Tis the terror of tempest. The rags of the sail
Are flickering in ribbons within the
fierce gale. (p. 539)

Homer's painting Watching the Tempest depicts a rescue crew on shore viewing a wreck at sea. Likewise, the word "tempest" appears repeatedly throughout the poem. Moreover, Homer also shows a rowboat

about to be launched for the rescue, the same action described by Shelley:

Lo! a boat
Advances; twelve rowers with the impulse
of thought
Urge on the keen keel, the brine of foams. (p. 542)

The two survivors appear in another painting, namely, The Gale of 1893. This work shows the woman with her child walking along the shore during a fierce gale. Shelley also refers to the storm as a gale and projects the image of the mother protecting her infant:

She clasps a bright child on her
ungathered knee,
It laughs at the lightening, it mocks
the mixed thunder
Of the air and the sea, with desire
and with wonder. (p. 540)

Homer paints the same "bright child" in The Gale, wide-eyed and filled with wonder, clinging to his mother who braces herself against the elements. The artist silhouettes their heads against the sky above the horizon line much like Shelley silhouettes his child sitting at the uppermost part of the helm. Their forms at the helm achieve added importance by the surrounding aura of light:

Around her wild eyes, her bright hand,
and her head,
Like a meteor of light a'er the waters! (p. 542)

Such a strong area of light occurs not only around the mother and child in The Gale, but in Light on the Sea, where Homer radiates

light around the woman's head and hands. This bright light shows no definite source, and the analogy to a meteor holds strong.

Hunter Ingalls made the comment that to appreciate the painting A Summer Night as a simple literal transcription of a scene that took place on the Homer household porch derives far less content from the work than it actually contains.⁵ The key to the deeper mystery of the painting lies in its connection with Shelley's poem, "The Triumph of Life." In this poem, Shelley not only presents an analogous image of a woman dancing along the edge of the water, but also the image of a shadowy group of observers. The painting emerges more as "literal transcription" of the poem than as a charming event on Homer's porch. Shelley means the dancing woman to stand for life, the same symbolism Homer intends for his image of woman. As in the painting, Shelley's figures move in "A silver music on the mossy lawn" (p. 481). Analogous to Homer's women who are dancing in rhythm to the rising and falling of the ocean, Shelley's woman loses herself in the music of nature:

As one enamoured is upborn in dream
 O'er lily-paven lakes 'mid silver mist,
 To wondrous music, so this shape
 might seem.
 Partly to tread the waves with feet
 which kissed
 The dancing form; partly to glide along
 The air which roughened the moist
 amethyst,
 Or the faint morning beams that
 feel among
 The trees, or the soft shadows of the trees;
 And her feet, ever to the ceaseless song
 Of leaves, and winds, and waves, and
 birds and bees

And failing drops, moved in a measure new
 Yet sweet, as on the summer evening breeze. . . .
 (pp. 481-82)

Even the shadowy group who gazes enigmatically out to sea finds their counterpart in the poem. The group is not only similar as a dim, distant shape, but the postures of the figures in the group reflect those assumed by the forms in the poem:

The grove
 Grew dense with shadows to its inmost covers,
 The earth was gray with phantoms, and the air
 Was peopled with dim forms. . . .
 And others sat chattering like restless apes
 On vulgar hands. . . . (p. 484)

The final comparison between Shelley and Homer does not relate to Homer's theme of woman and the sea, but as an analogy, reinforces Homer's borrowing of imagery from Shelley. The 1904 painting Kissing the Moon (Fig. 50) depicts three men in a small boat which rests between the high waves, thus making visible only their heads and shoulders. The waves, being so gigantic, nearly touch, or "kiss" the disc of the moon. It has often been remarked that the title is rather unusual, as is the daring composition.⁶ The same metaphor, however, appears in Shelley's "Love's Philosophy":

And the sunlight clasps the earth
 And the moonbeams kiss the sea. (p. 530)

This similarity further substantiates Homer's visualization of Shelley's imagery, which expresses the theme of woman, mother of her race, spiritually united to the sea as a life source. In

illustrating specific passages of Shelley's poetry, the relationship between Homer's art and nineteenth-century literature thus becomes concrete and causal. Shelly provides the conclusive key to Homer's interest in nineteenth-century literature as a source for ideas concerning evolution, transcendentalism and woman, which he then assimilates into his symbolic statements on woman and the sea.

This study of Homer's symbolic paintings of woman and the sea has first compared the thematic differences between his paintings of woman and his paintings of men in order to establish the singularity of the woman image. Homer depicts the men engaged in the mechanical actions of sea-faring life. They are physically protected from the elements by their clothes, and their concerns lie within a practical sphere. This applies not only to the visual content of the paintings, but also to the titles of the works, such as The Dory, The Fog Warning, and The Herring Net, which identify man's activity with the technical, physical, and concrete activities of the sea.

Women, on the other hand, identify with the sea on a supernatural, spiritual level. They quite often engage in no activity whatsoever, but gaze enigmatically out to sea. As the titles of the paintings The Gale, Undertow, Hark! the Lark and The West Wind indicate, their alliance lies with nature and, more specifically, with the sea as a metaphysical, spiritual force. Their role thus becomes symbolic.

The exact meaning of this symbolic theme provides a thrust for

this study. Personal and artistic reasons might account for a change toward a symbolic interpretation of woman, as opposed to Homer's depiction of her in earlier years. Whatever the cause for such a change, a source exists which not only accounts for the thematic change itself but reveals the meaning of Homer's woman image--that source being nineteenth-century literature. In Homer's collection of readings a basic interrelationship or continuity among the literary figures emerges, in that they all reveal a characteristically nineteenth-century attitude toward nature. There is a stress on evolution with the sea as origin of life, a stress on the transcendental or spiritual unity of man with nature, and an ancient, universal focus to woman as mother of her race. Homer then translates these separate elements into a personal symbolism in which he associates woman as progenitor spiritually allied with the sea as a comparable life source.

Homer's book readings have provided general interpretative substantiation where the thematic content of the literature and the painting show parallels. Shelley's poetry in particular becomes the conclusive link which not only establishes nineteenth-century literature as a coherent body of ideas and sources for Homer's symbolism, but supports their transformation into a personal, symbolic statement, epitomized by Homer's literal translation of Shelley's poetry. It is because of such symbolism that the paintings of women and the sea no longer belong with those of the men, where Homer depicts man's war against nature. The woman image now

manifests a meaning apart from the image of man. She is not in physical opposition against the forces of the sea. Rather, she is a metaphoric mother of the human race in spiritual alliance with the evolutionary source of life, the sea.

NOTES

¹Beach, p. 210.

²Beach, p. 210, refers his readers to Carl Grabo's study A Newton Among Poets. Grabo shows that Erasmus Darwin associated the emergence of Dione with the theory of evolution. Grabo therefore concludes that Shelley's almost identical account of Asia rising from the sea should also stand as a type of organic nature.

³The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, ed. Edward Dowden (London: Macmillan and Company, 1920), p. 45. Hereafter references to this work will appear in the text by page number.

⁴Downes, p. 149, cites a 1902 letter of Homer saying: "Only once in the last thirty years have I made a duplicate, and that was a watercolor from my oil picture now owned by the Layton Art Gallery, Milwaukee, called 'Hark! the Lark.' It is the most important picture I ever painted, and the very best one, as the figures are large enough to have some expression in their faces. The watercolor was called 'A Voice from the Cliff,' and well-known."

⁵Ingalls, p. 21.

⁶For discussion of the unusual title and composition of this painting see Downes, p. 223, and Flexner, p. 112.

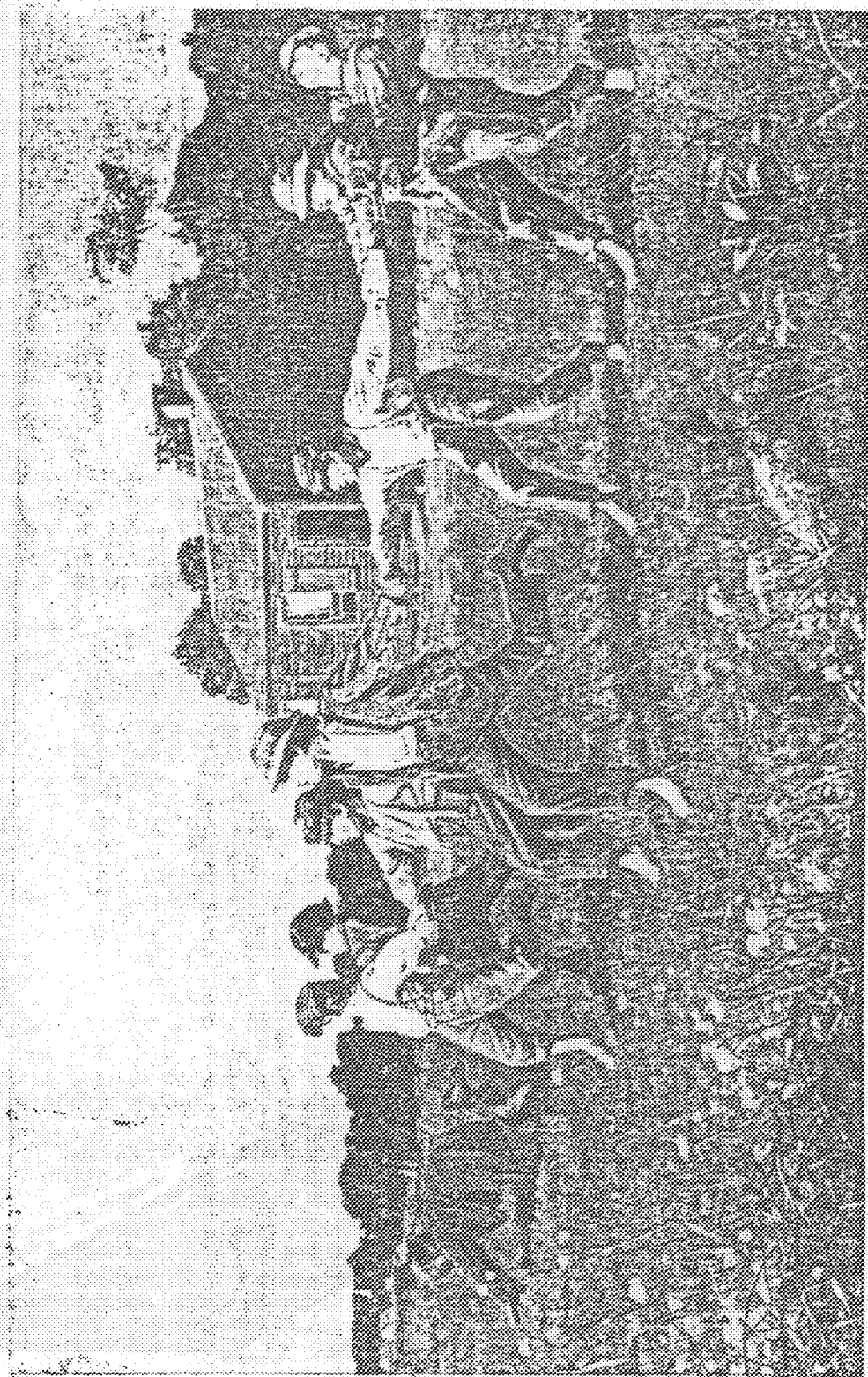


Figure 1.

Soap the Whip, 1872.



Figure 2.
Breezing Up, 1876.

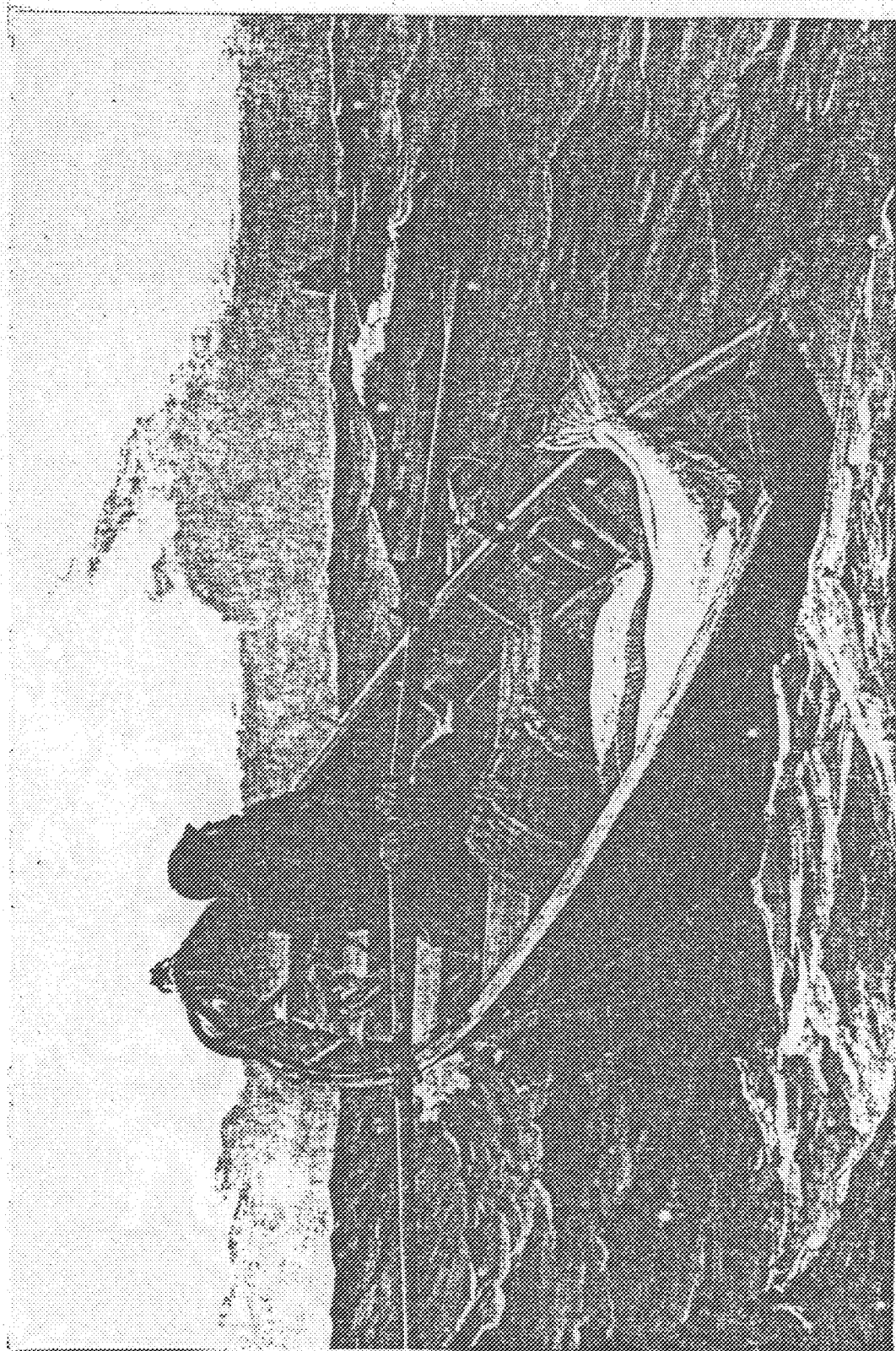


Figure 3.
Fog Warning, 1885.



Figure 4. Eight Bells, 1886.

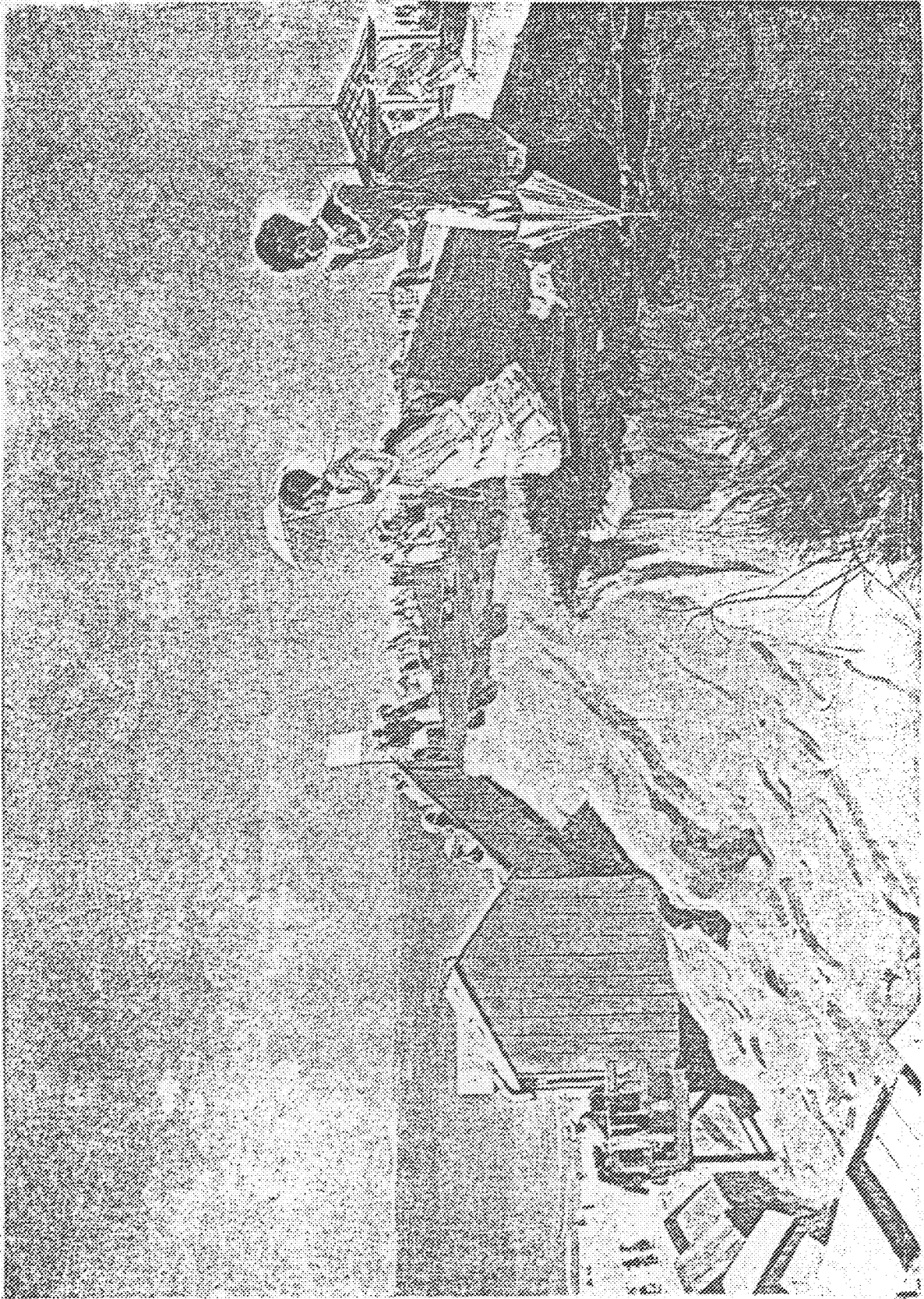


Figure 5. Long Branch, New Jersey, 1869.



Figure 6.

Paris Mabilles Dance Hall, 1866.



Figure 7.

The Bridle Path, Mount Washington, 1868.

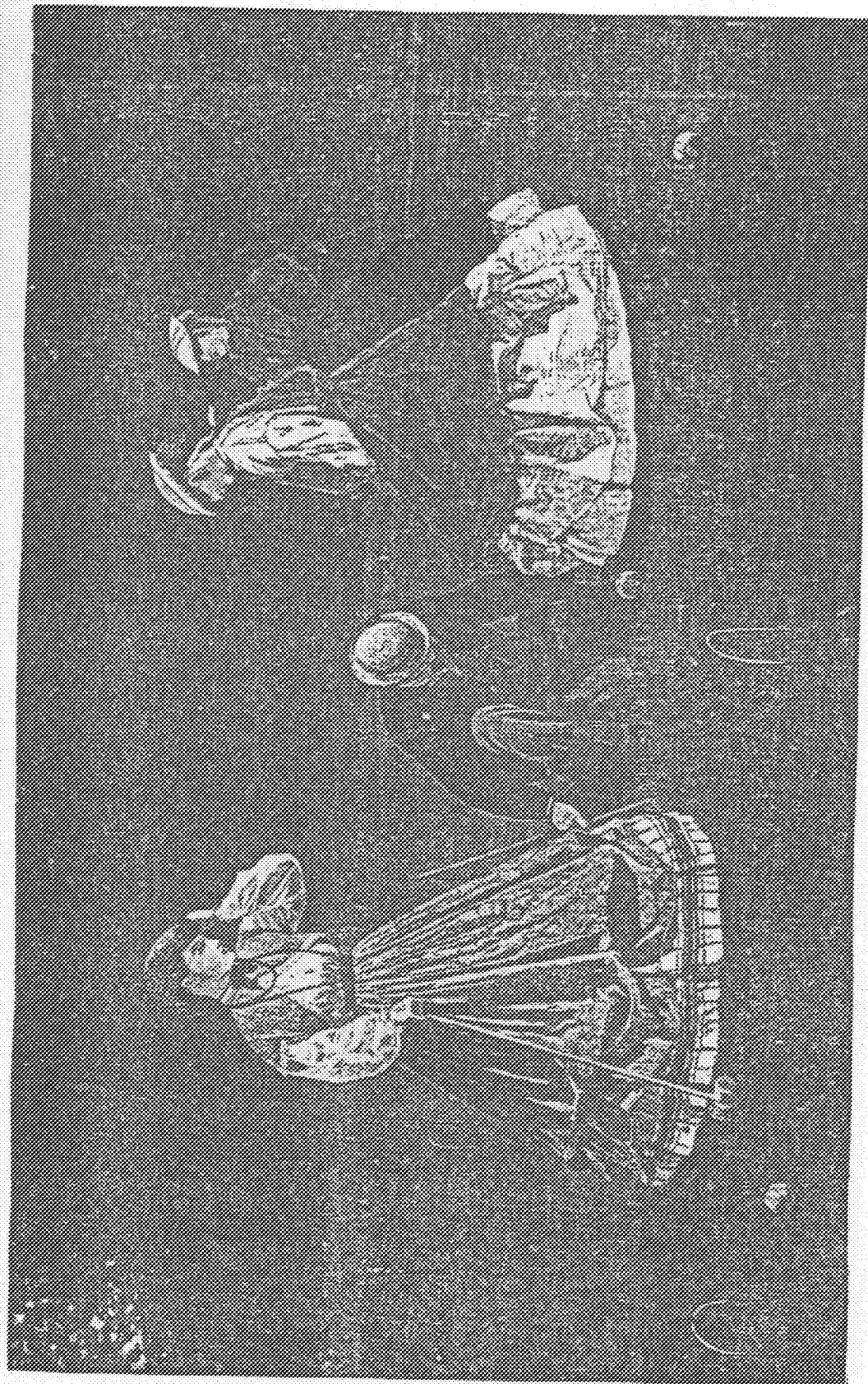


Figure 8.
Croquet Scene, 1866.



Figure 9.
Croquet Players, 1865.



Figure 10. The Life Line, 1884.

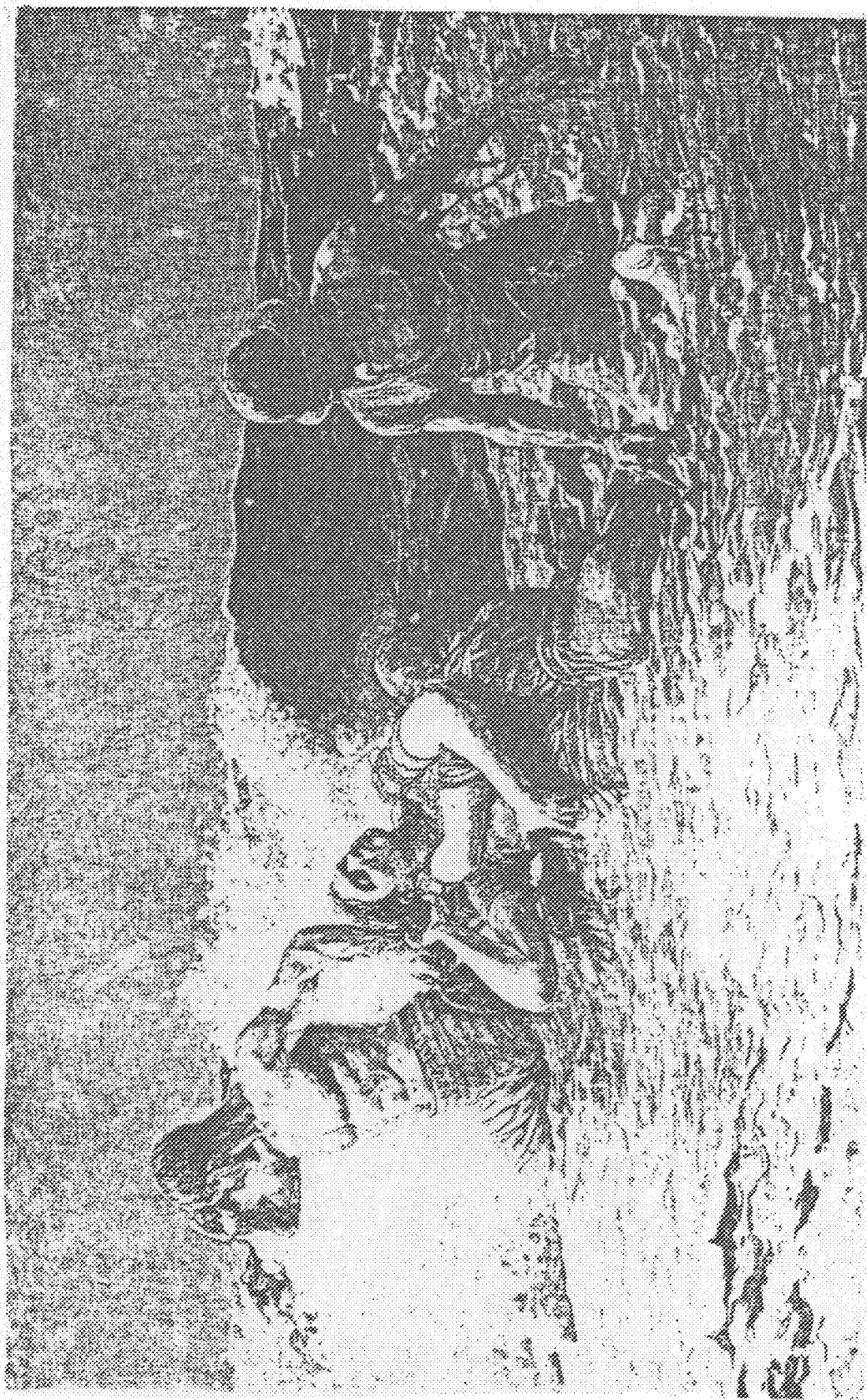


Figure 11. Indertow, 1886.



Figure 12. High Tide: The Bathers, 1920.



Figure 13. Hunting for Eggs, 1874.

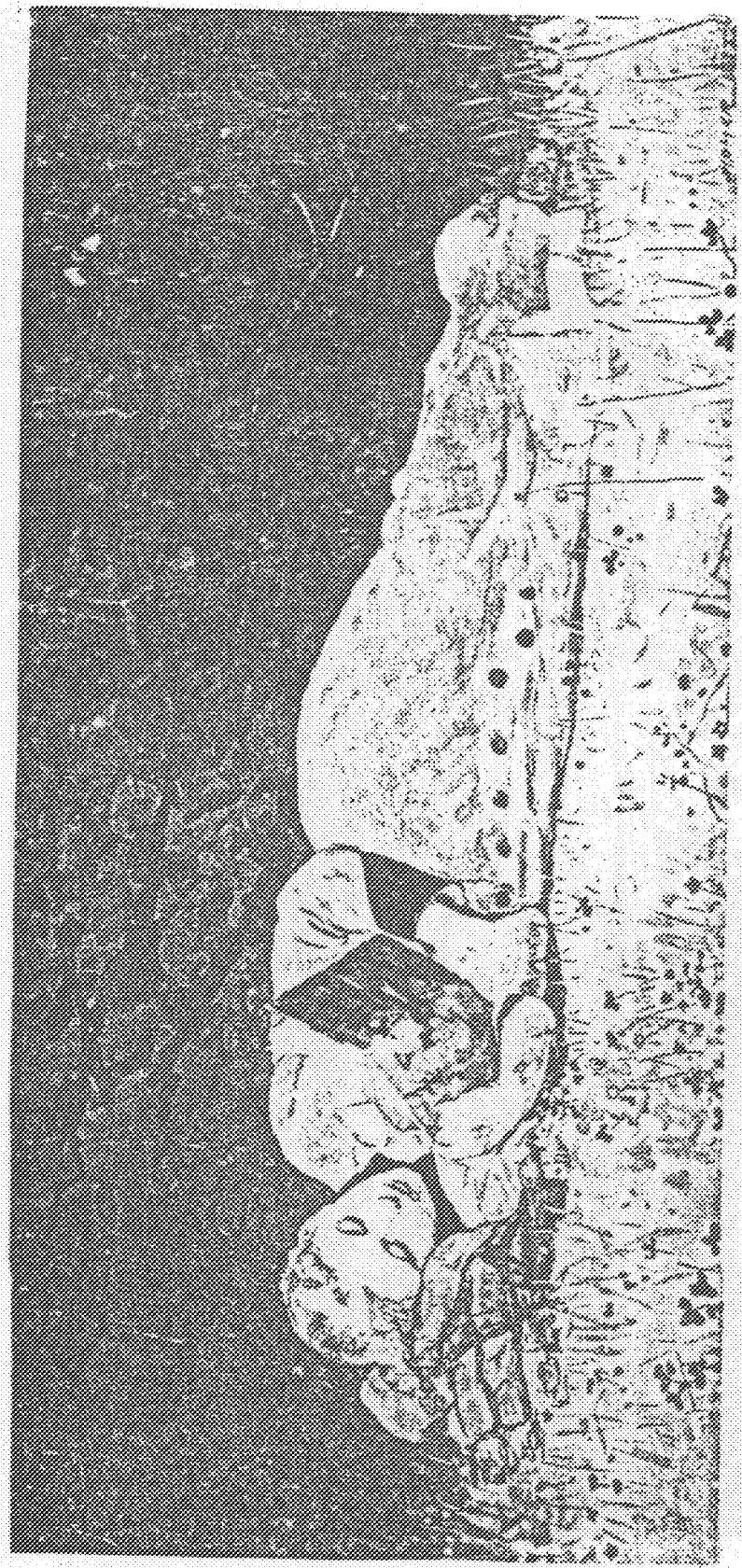


Figure 14,
The New Novel, 1977.



Figure 15. In the Garden, 1874.

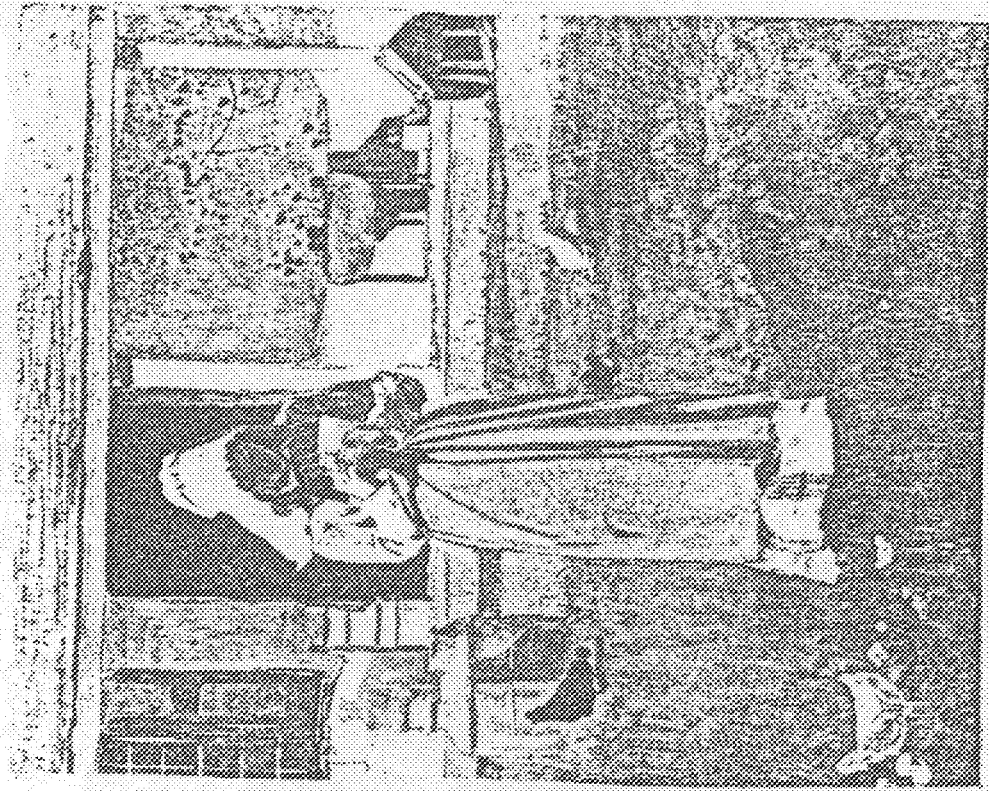


Figure 16.
The Sick Chicken, 1874.



Figure 17. Milking, 1875.

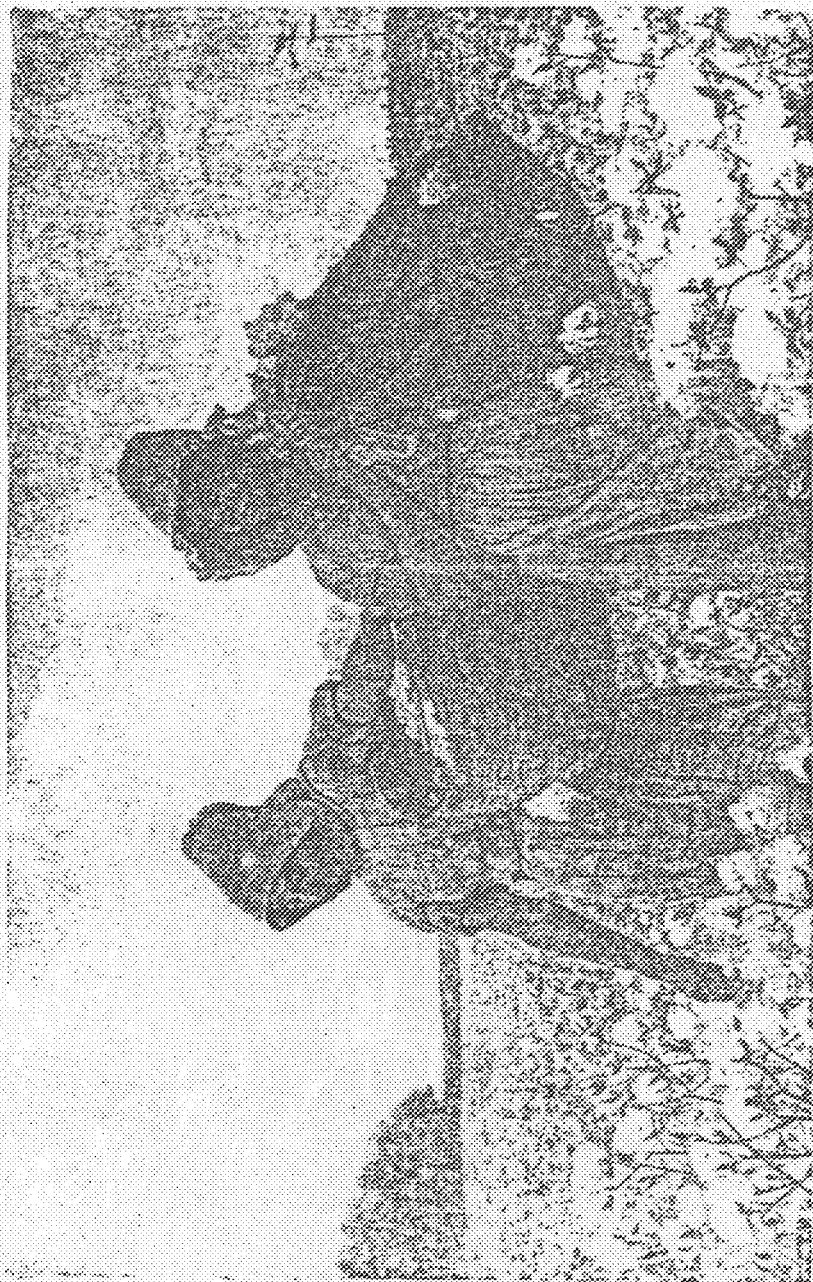


Figure 18.
Cotton Pickers, 1876.



Figure 19. Fresh Air, 1878.

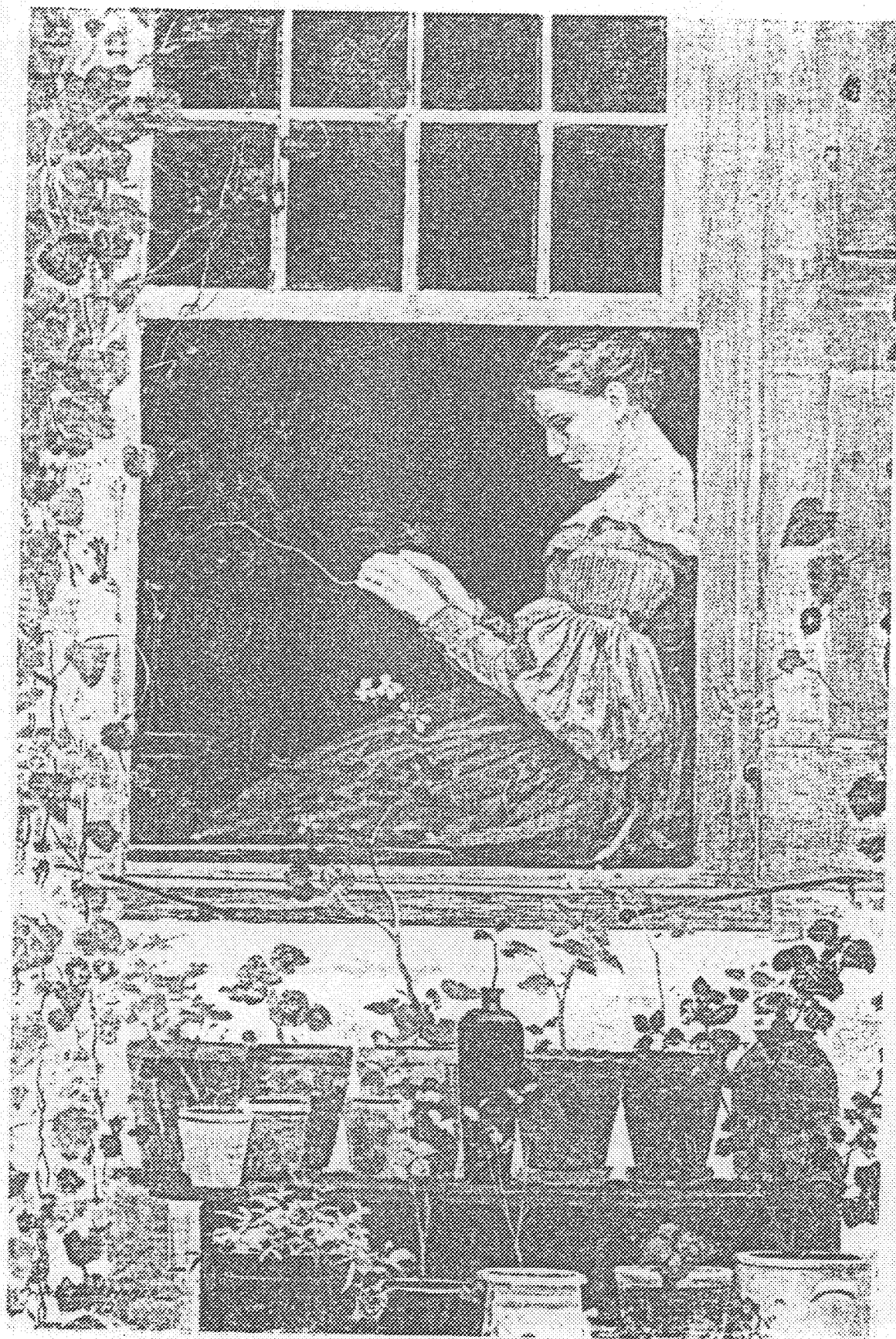


Figure 20. Morning Glories, 1873.



Figure 21. The Dinner Room, 1873.

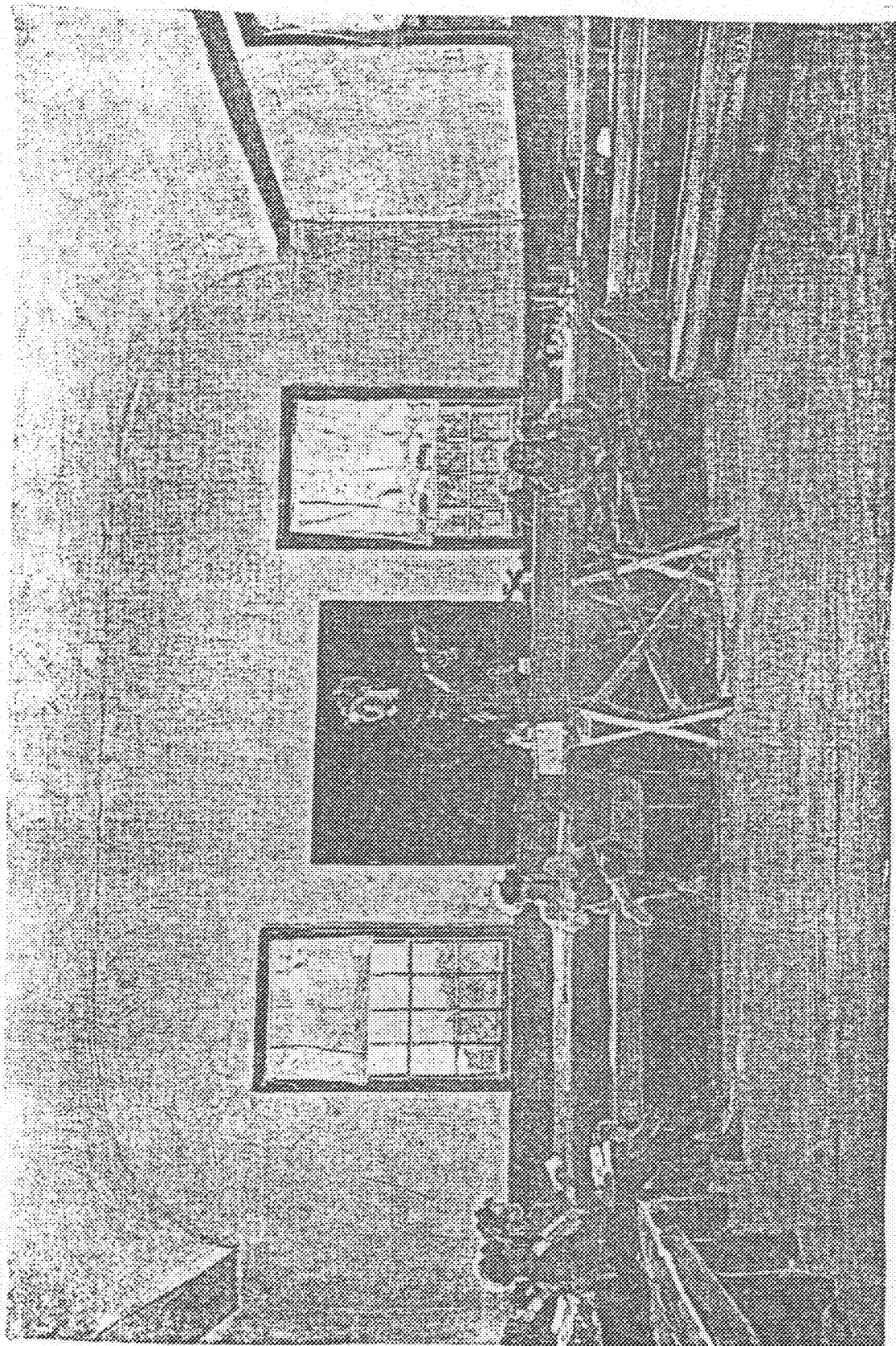


Figure 22.
New England Country School, 1872.



Figure 21.

Shall I Tell Your Fortune?, 1878.



Figure 24.

Inside the Bar, 1953.

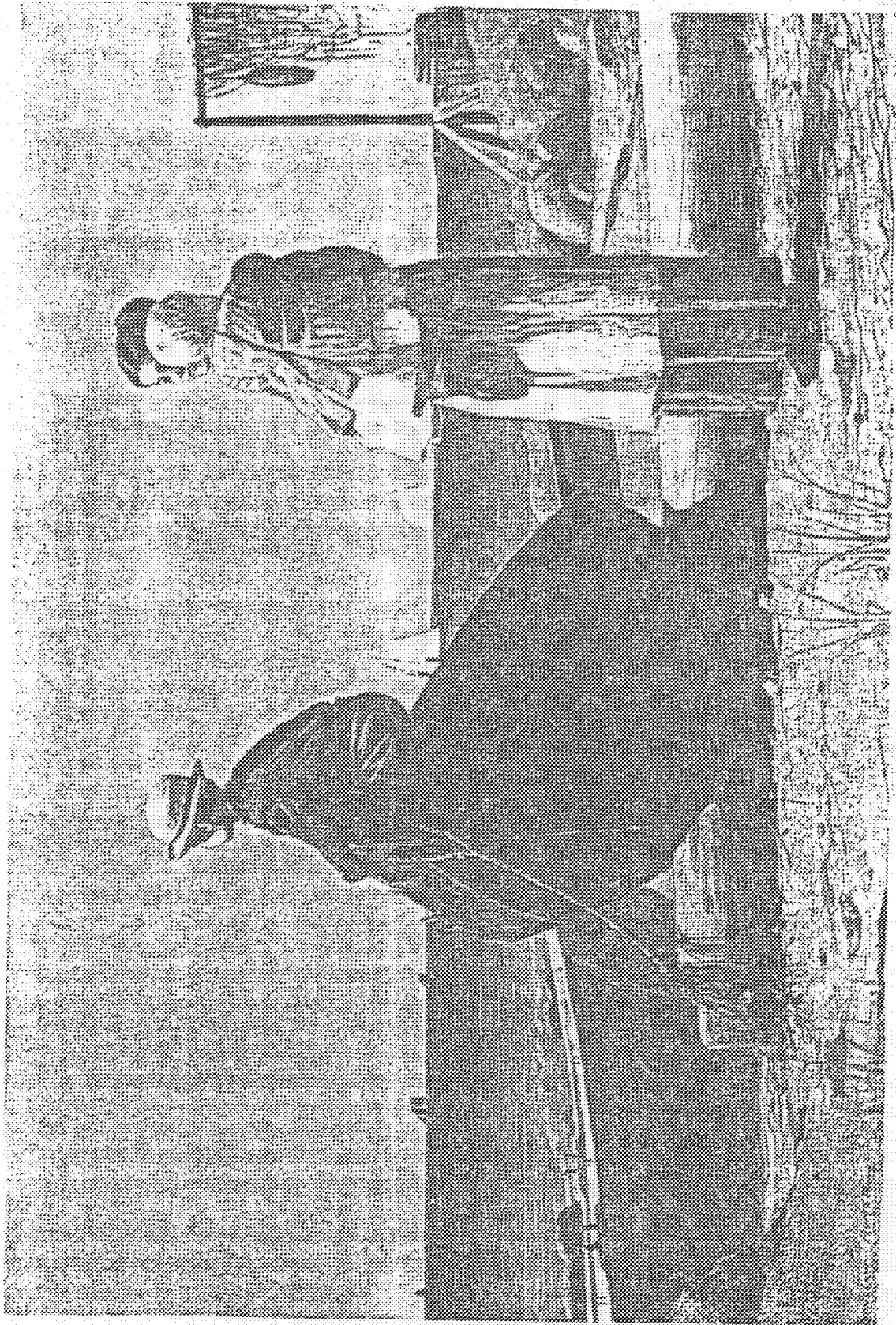


Figure 25. Waiting for Dad, 1873.



Figure 26.

Raphael: Galatea, c. 1513.

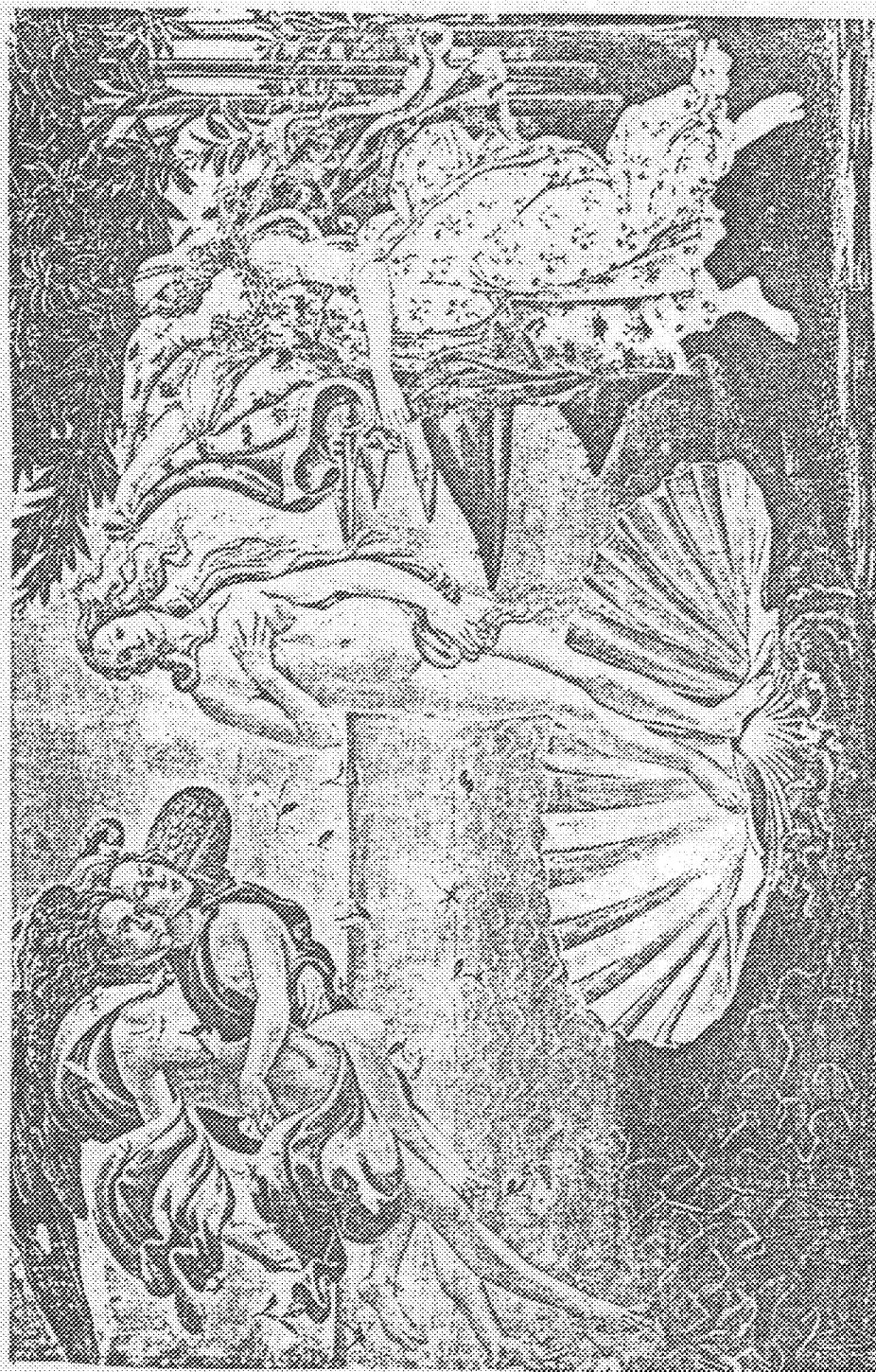


Figure 27.

Botticelli: Birth of Venus, after 1482.

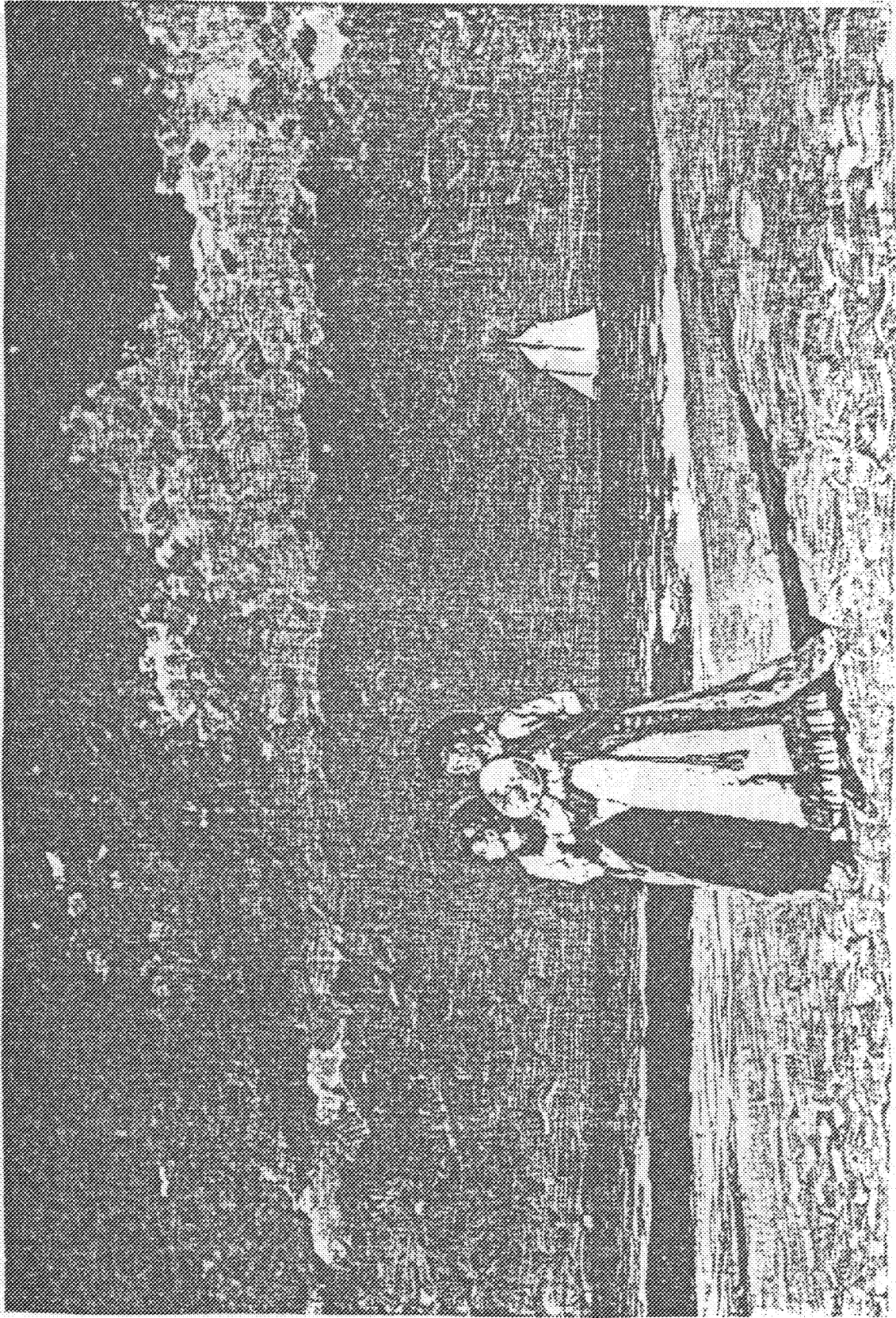


Figure 28. Fromenade on the Beach, 1880.

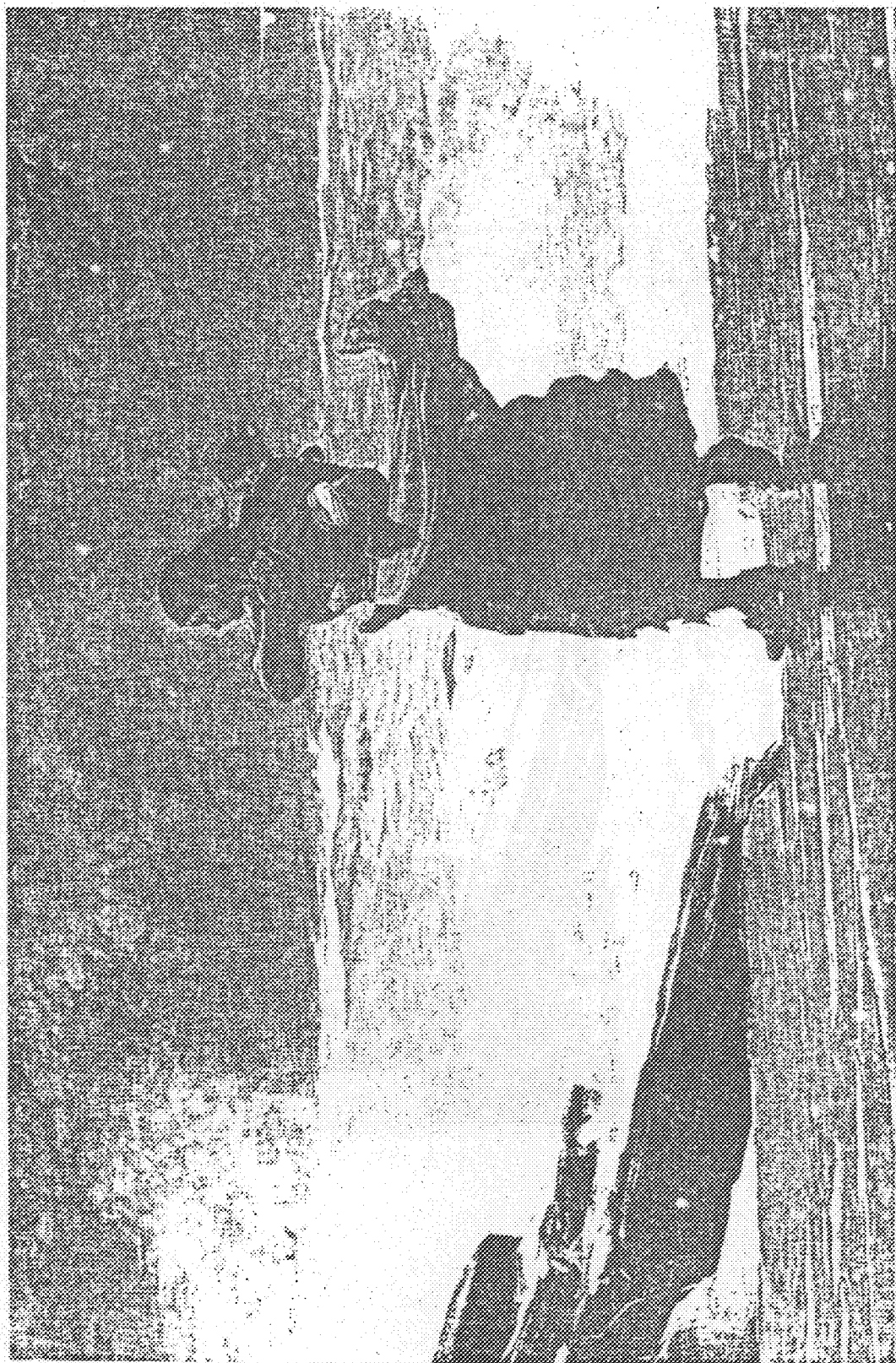


Figure 29.
The Gale, 1883-93.

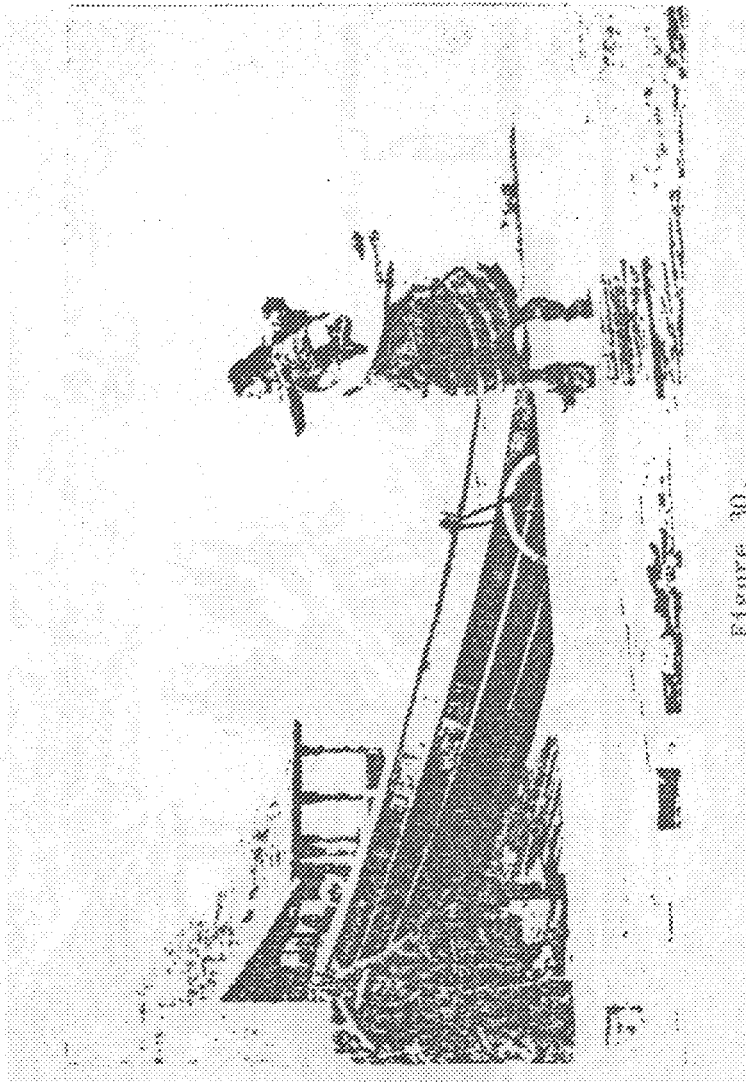


Figure 30.

Coming Away of the Gale, 1883.

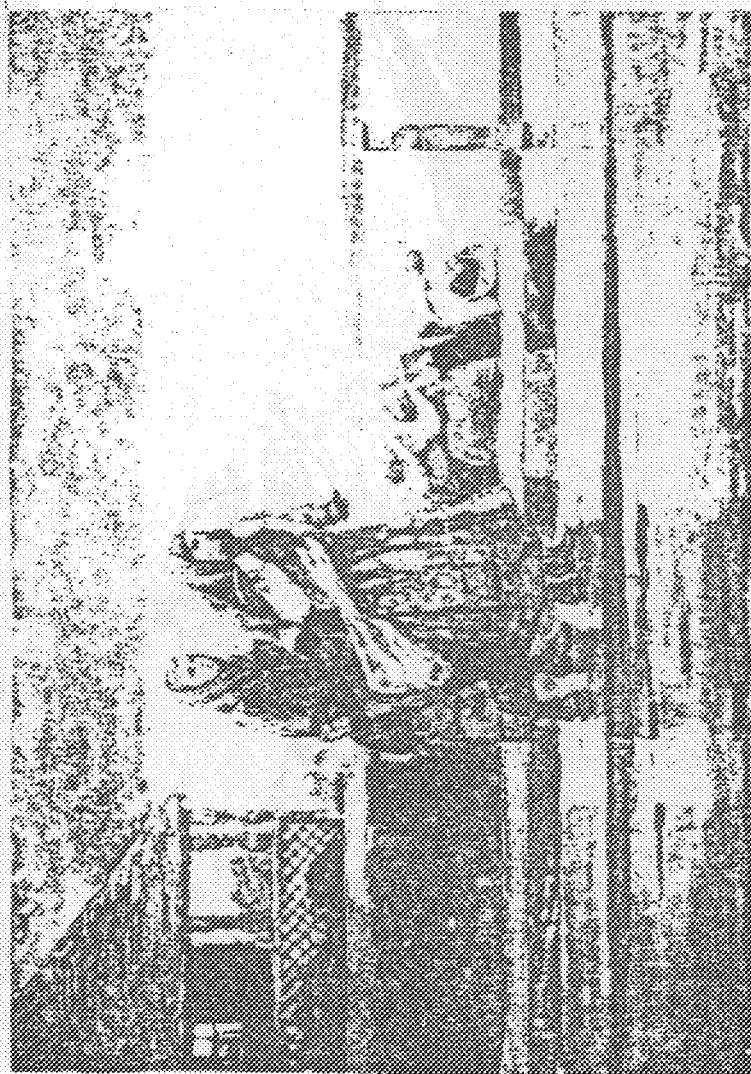


Figure 31.

Perils of the Sea, 1881.

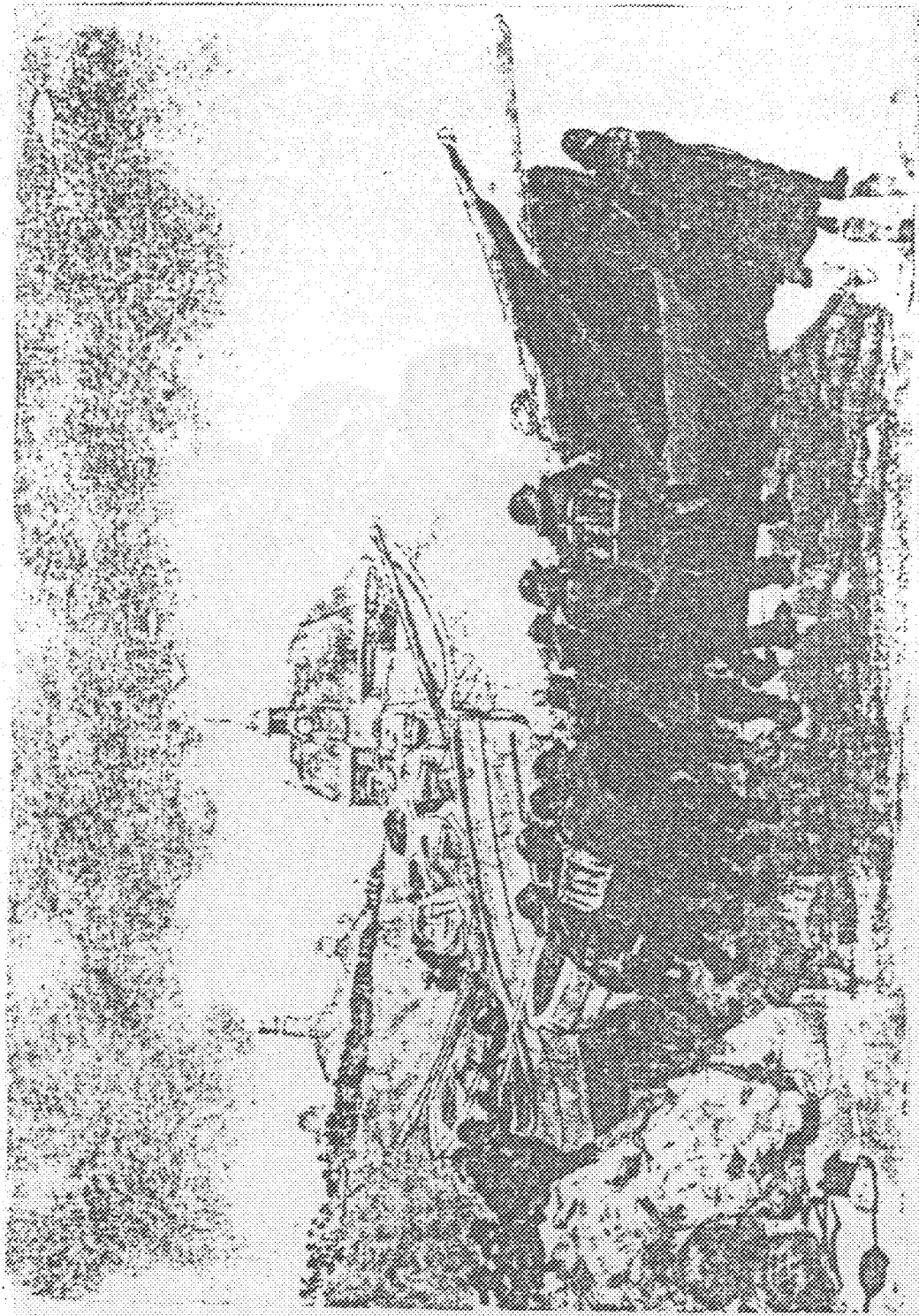


Figure 32. Watching the Tempest, 1881.



Figure 33. Hark! the Lark, 1882.



Figure 34.
Flamborough Head, 1882.

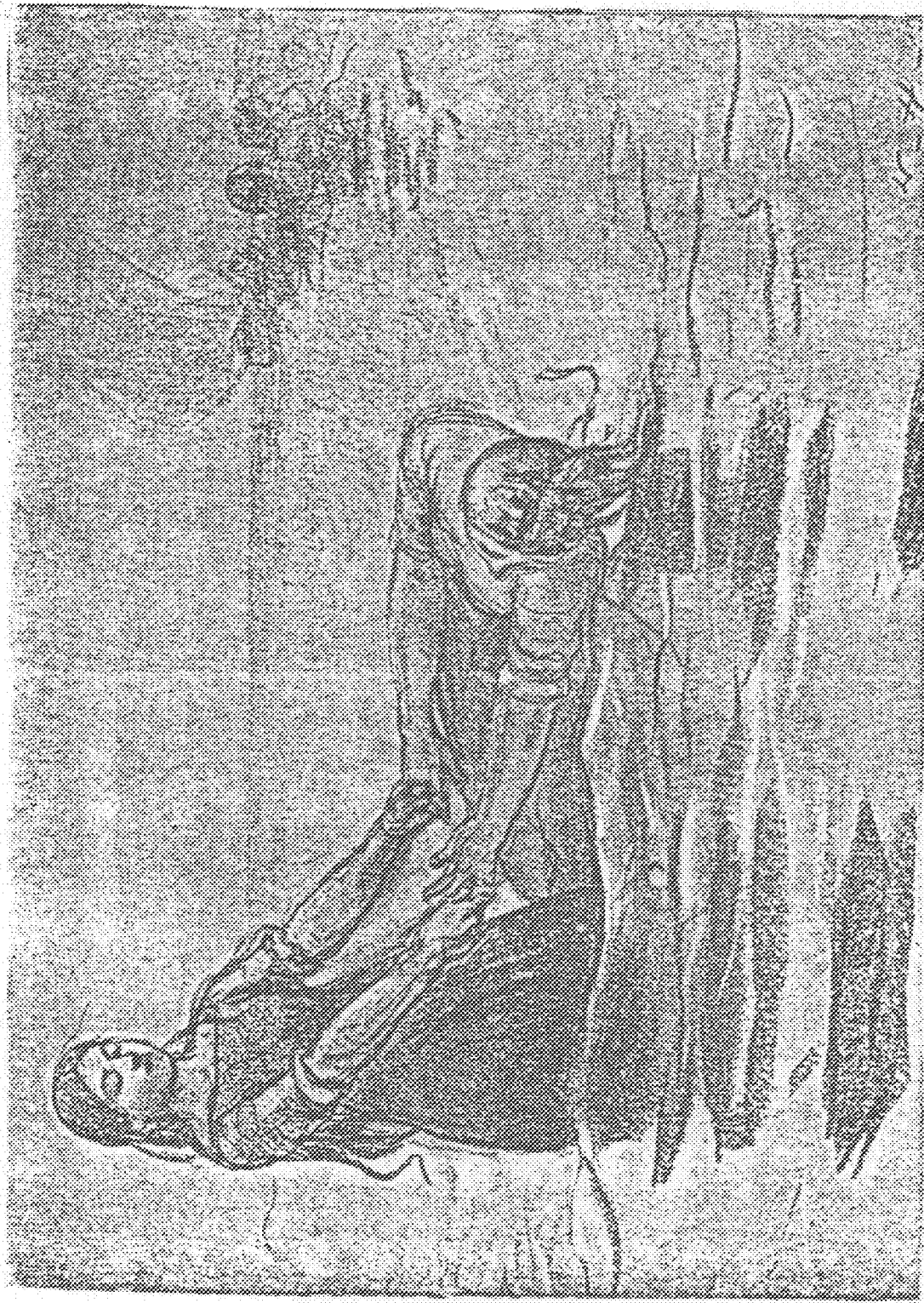


Figure 35. The Bathers, 1882.

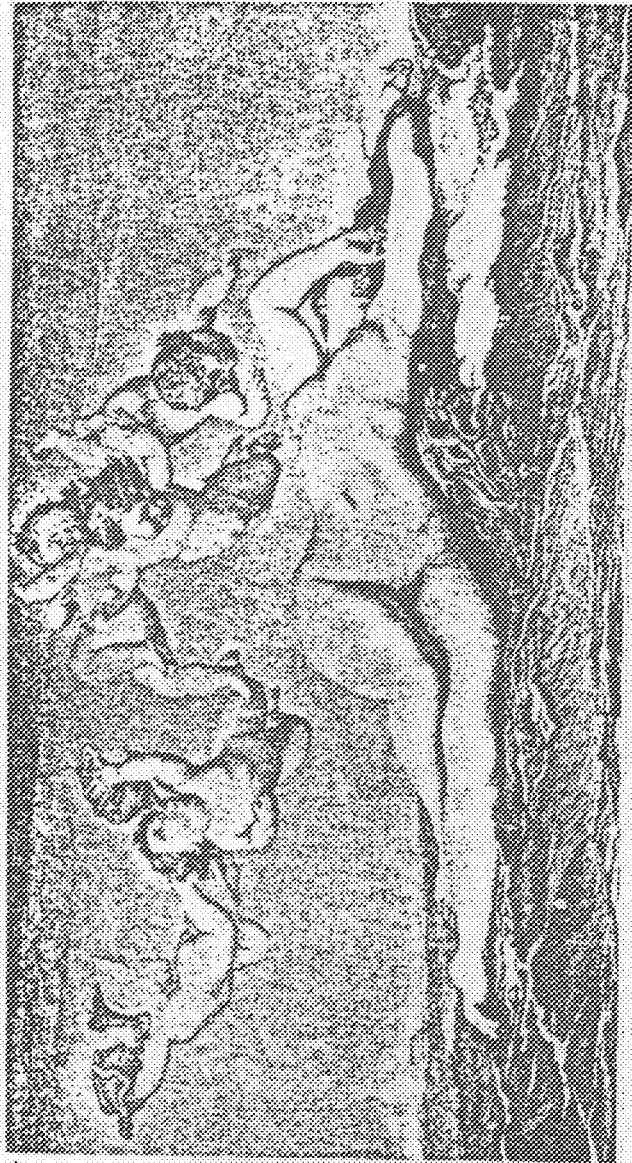


Figure 36.

Alexandre Cabanel; Birth of Venus.

Figure 36. The Birth of Venus. 1865.



Figure 37. The West Wind, 1891.



Figure 38.

A Summer Night, 1890.



Figure 39.

A Moonlit Sea, 1890.



Figure 40. Looking Out to Sea, date unknown.



Figure 41.

Sunset, Saco Bay, 1896.



Figure 42.

The Fisher Girl, 1894.



Figure 43.

On the Cliffs, 1891.



Figure 64.

A light on the Sea, 1897.



Figure 45. Early Evening, 1881-1907.



Figure 46. The Lockout-"All's Well," 1896.



Figure 47.
The Herring Net, 1885.

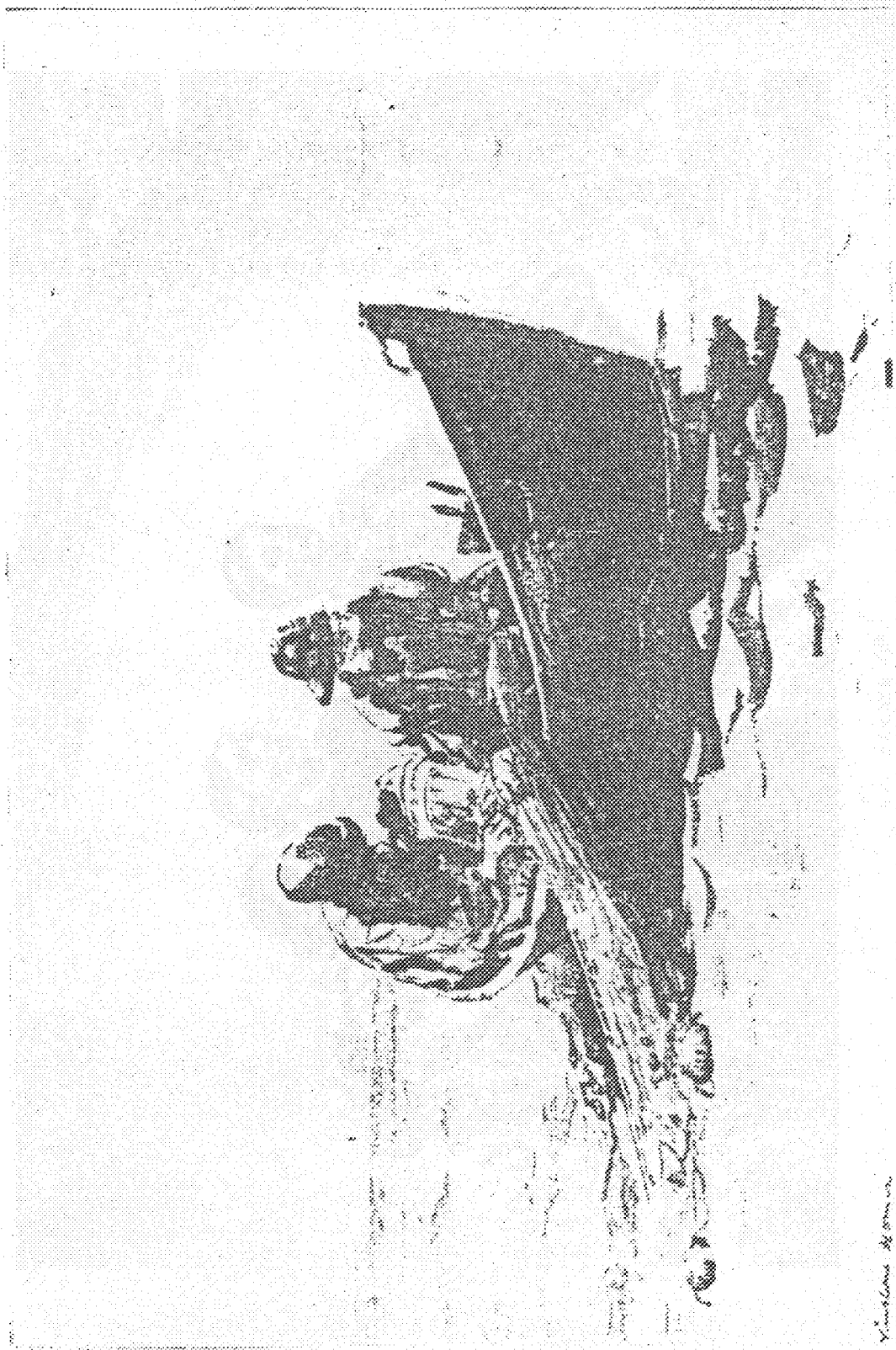


Figure 48. The Dory, c. 1884.

Vancouver 1879-1881

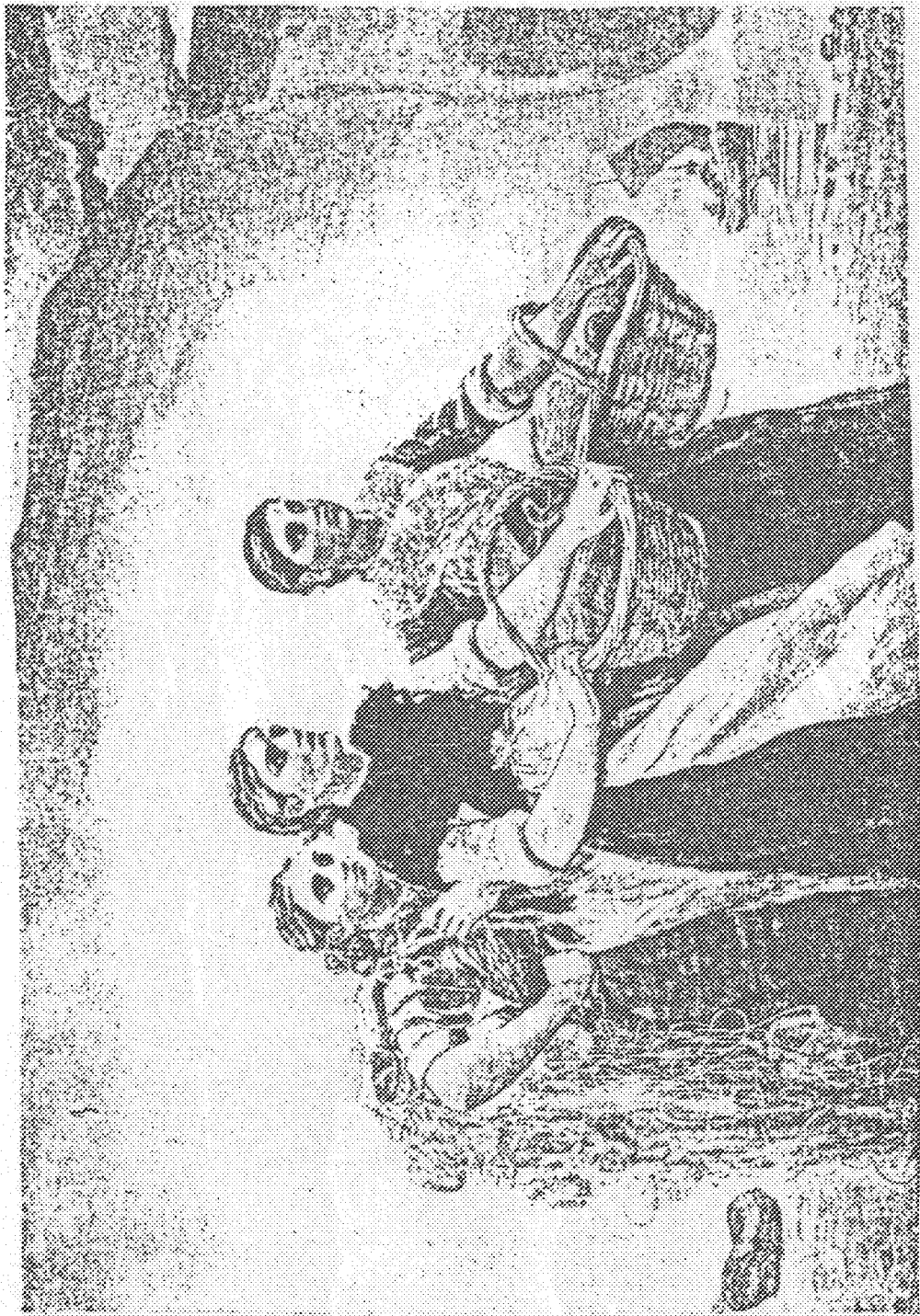


Figure 49.

A Voice from the Cliffs, 1883.



Figure 50. Kissing the Moon, 1904.

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APPROVED BY

J. M. Dennis

DATE

Sept. 29, 1978