Edwin Austin Abbey

(1 April 1852 – 1 August 1911)

Ken Kempcke
Montana State University

SELECTED BOOKS ILLUSTRATED: Dickens, Charles, *Christmas Stories* (New York: Harper's Household Editions, 1875);

Bryant, William Cullen, and Sydney Howard Gay, *Popular History of the United States,* 4 volumes (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, 1876–1878);

Dickens, Charles, *The Uncommercial Traveler* (New York, 1879);

Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth, *The Poetical Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1880);

Herrick, Robert, *Selections from the Poetry of Robert Herrick* (New York: Harper, 1882);

De Mille, James, *A Castle in Spain* (New York: Harper's Library of Select Novels no. 615, 1883);

Sheridan, Richard B., *Sheridan's Comedies: The Rivals and The School for Scandal* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1885);

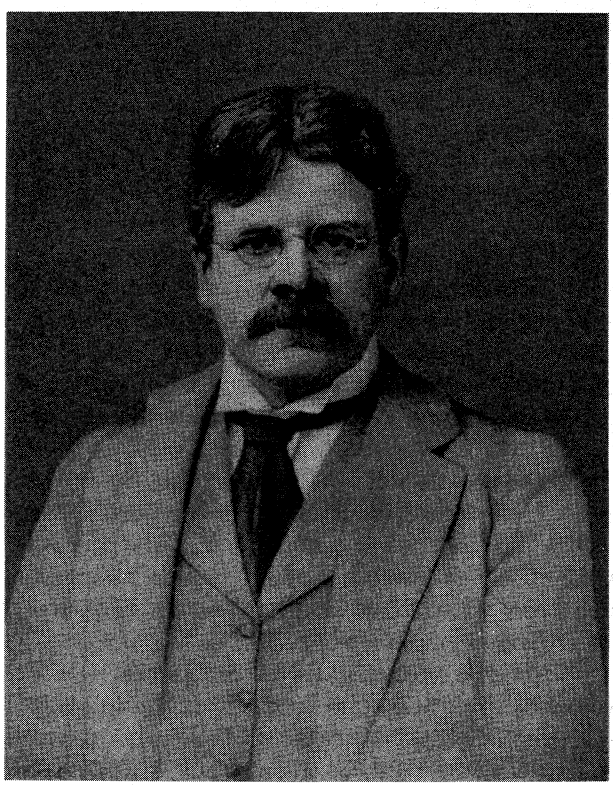
Boughton, George Henry, *Sketching Rambles in Holland* (New York: Harper, 1885);

Shinn, Earl, and F. Hopkinson Smith, *A Book of the Tile Club* (Boston & New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 1887);

Goldsmith, Oliver, *She Stoops to Conquer* (New York: Harper, 1887; deluxe folio edition, 1892; London: Sampson, Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1888);

Old Songs (New York: Harper, 1889);

The Quiet Life: Certain Verses by Various Hands (New York: Harper, 1890, 1899; London: Sampson, Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1890);



Edwin Austin Abbey (photograph by Bassano)

Shakespeare, William, *The Comedies of William Shakespeare,* 4 volumes (New York: Harper, 1896);

Goldsmith, Oliver, *The Deserted Village* (New York: Harper, 1902);

Malory, Thomas, *King Arthur Stories from Malory: Done from the Text of Sir Thomas Malory's Morte d'Arthur,* edited by Lillion O. Stevens and Ed-

ward Frank Allen (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1908).

PERIODICALS: *Harper's Weekly,* 1870–1909;
Harper's Monthly, 1870–1909;
Scribner's Monthly, 1874–1876;
St. Nicholas, 1874–1876;
Scribner's Magazine, 1894–1895.

At a time when the art of book and magazine illustration was at its zenith, Edwin Austin Abbey was recognized as one of its most distinguished masters. Perhaps the most popular and successful artist of his day, Abbey's genius as an illustrator, principally of William Shakespeare's works and English songs and tales, is derived from his crisp and refined pen-and-ink work and from his devotion to historical research and authenticity. The story embellishments he provided through his elegant illustrations were complementary not only because of their charm and beauty but also because of the artist's remarkable compassion and comprehension of their English themes. Abbey was both an illustrator and an artist in the fullest sense. From his small black-and-white illustrations for *Harper's Weekly* and *Harper's Monthly* magazines to his grand mural paintings in the Boston Public Library and Pennsylvania State Capitol, his work was characterized by an exceptional measure of artistic devotion. By the conclusion of the nineteenth century Abbey had become the preeminent artist in English and American pictorial literature and had a profound influence on the illustrators who followed in his footsteps.

Abbey was born in Philadelphia on 1 April 1852. He was the first child of William Maxwell Abbey, who sold wood and tobacco, and Margery Ann Kiple Abbey. The Abbey family grew to include Edwin's brother, William Burling (born in 1854), and a sister, Jane Kiple (born in 1858).

Abbey's mother was well read and early on developed Abbey's literary tastes. The family's home included a modest collection of books. His parents had intended for Edwin to enter the University of Pennsylvania to become a minister in the Episcopalian Church, of which they were members. They enrolled him in Henry D. Gregory's School, one of the leading private secondary schools in Philadelphia, but Abbey admitted in his later years that he was a disappointment as a schoolboy. Despite their disappointment in his academic work, his parents encouraged the artistic talents that he exhibited as a child. In 1866 he began to attend the art studio of Isaac L. Williams, a landscape and portrait painter. This was the first step in Abbey's artistic training. In 1867, at age fourteen, Abbey began to contribute illustrations to William Taylor Adams's magazine, *Our Boys and Girls,* a young people's periodical. He signed his submissions with the pen name "Yorick" in ironic reference to the dead jester in Shakespeare's *Hamlet.*

In 1868, encouraged by his father, Abbey began an apprenticeship at the wood-engraving firm of Van Ingen and Snyder in Philadelphia to learn the art of drawing on wood for illustrating. Abbey excelled at his work and was soon given the responsibility of creating drawings for schoolbooks, geographies, readers, and spellers. He also developed his talents as an art editor by reading galley proofs of books and selecting passages for illustration.

After work Abbey attended art classes at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts under the guidance of Christian Schussele. Abbey studied what he called "the science of constructive drawing" and produced illustrations based on the stories of Charles Dickens and Shakespeare. As his biographer, E. V. Lucas, points out, Abbey used books as tools to create artwork. He was meticulous in detail, spending hours at his sketchbook creating intricate drawings of sections of furniture and parts of the human anatomy.

Abbey began to follow the developments of the Pre-Raphaelite school in England and the work of the master German pen-and-ink artist Adolph Menzel. While employed at Van Ingen and Snyder, Abbey began to submit some of his drawings to *Harper's Weekly* in New York, the dynamic center of the American illustrated press. Periodicals, especially monthly periodicals, were expanding to include not only news pictorials but also illustrated feature articles on such subjects as history, natural history, travel, local color, and literature. Abbey's first drawing accepted by *Harper's* was a full-page illustration, *The Puritans' First Thanksgiving,* published in *Harper's Weekly* on 3 December 1870 when the artist was eighteen.

Art editor Charles Parsons wrote Abbey's father offering Edwin, or "Ned" as he came to be known, an opportunity to work for Harper and Brothers in Franklin Square (New York City) for fifteen dollars a week. With the support of his father, Abbey joined the illustrators' department of Harper in February 1871 when he was still eighteen. Harper's magazines were the premier illustrated journals of their time and had on staff a venerable group of international artists who greatly influenced Abbey. The well-traveled and prolific artist C. S. Reinhart, a devotee of the current English style, became Abbey's mentor at Harper. Abbey's colleagues also included John Alexander, Howard Pyle, Harry Fenn, and Joseph Pennell. Abbey was associated

with Harper for the next thirty-four years, his last illustration for *Harper's Monthly* appearing in 1909.

The American public had a great penchant for English literature in the late 1800s, and much of *Harper's Monthly* was filled with serial reproductions of great English works. Abbey's major task was to illustrate many of these works, but his work also included a great diversity of subjects. He proved himself to be a tireless, dedicated, and enterprising worker who often used mail carriers and colleagues at Harper for models. Often Abbey worked from photographs to depict travel scenes such as his sketch *Round by Propeller* in 1872. With his joyous nature and sense of humor, Abbey gained many friends in New York and became one of Harper's most prolific illustrators.

In 1874 issues of *Harper's Monthly* Abbey first provided illustrations to the works of Robert Herrick and Shakespeare, two authors whose works he became closely associated with in later life. For the February 1874 issue Abbey supplied a series of cartoons depicting scenes from everyday life humorously captioned with lines from Shakespeare's plays. Abbey's expert and sprightly style can be seen in such illustrations as those for Herrick's poem "Corinna's Going A-Maying," which appeared in May 1874. His drawings were influenced by English illustrators and their airy pen-and-ink technique. Over his lifetime Abbey compiled a scrapbook full of their work. The success of Abbey's early illustrations prompted Harper to raise his salary to twenty dollars a week at the end of his first year and to thirty-five at the end of his second.

After Abbey's third year Parsons was unable to secure another raise for him. In late 1874, believing he would have more flexibility and be able to make more money freelancing, Abbey left the firm and became an independent draftsman. Confident and ambitious, he moved into a studio on Union Square with the sculptor and illustrator James Edwin Kelly. The studio was soon filled with period costumes and props that the artists used as models for their work.

This period of freelance work in Abbey's life was eventful. Soon after moving in, Abbey was commissioned by Scribners to provide drawings for William Cullen Bryant and Sydney Howard Gay's *Popular History of the United States* (1876–1878), a schoolbook which in its four-volume 1896 edition includes more than sixteen hundred illustrations from some of the most prominent illustrators of the time, including many of Abbey's former associates at Harper. The publication of these volumes was not only a great achievement for Abbey's early career but also a milestone in the history of the illustrated book in America. After its publication Abbey contributed many illustrations to the magazines *Scribner's Monthly, St. Nicholas,* and *Century,* including drawings for Edward Everett Hale's "Philip Nolan's Friends" (*Scribner's Monthly,* January 1876), which exhibited his antiquarian style and concern for historical definitude.

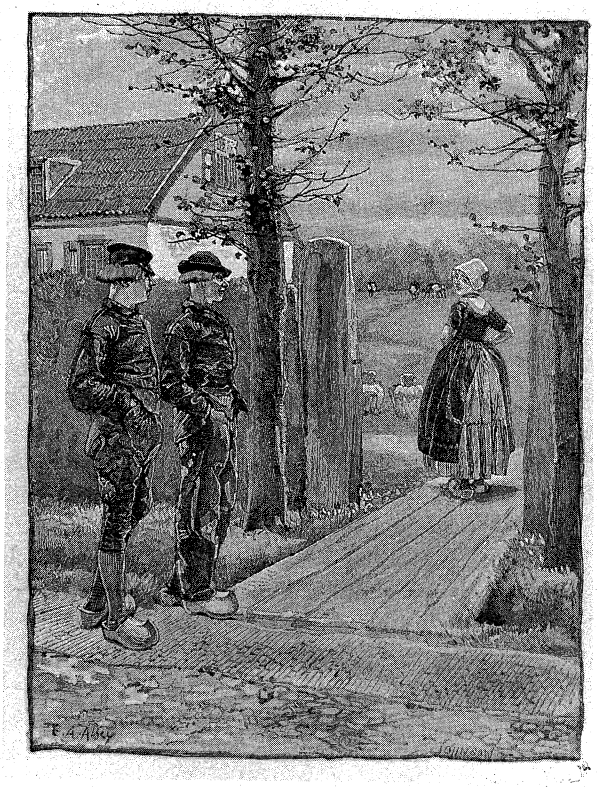


Illustration by Abbey for George Henry Boughton's Sketching Rambles in Holland *(1885)*

Abbey's interests grew to include the painting of watercolors; he exhibited some of his work in this medium for the first time at the American Watercolor Society in New York in 1874. The subject matter of his watercolor work, like his illustrations, tended to the narrative and was well received at the exhibition. His painting *The Sisters* eventually sold for $2,000, at that time the largest price ever given for an American watercolor. In 1876 Abbey was elected to membership in the American Watercolor Society and for many years contributed a painting to its annual exhibition.

Abbey continued his friendship with Charles Parsons, the kindly, paternalistic editor at Harper, who contracted with Abbey to produce illustrations for Harper's Household Edition of Dickens's *Christmas Stories* in 1875. In the same year Abbey attended an exhibition of Henry Blackburn's English watercolors which, together with Abbey's Pre-Raphaelite

studies, influenced his artistic direction. His illustrations in *Christmas Stories* reveal this influence. As Abbey grew in reputation and expertise, Harper decided that it wanted the artist back in its employ and offered him fifty dollars a week to return to its art department. Abbey accepted the offer in 1876 and soon completed forty-five illustrations for Charles Dickens's *The Uncommercial Traveler* (1879).

To interrupt the monotony of office routine, Abbey would sometimes turn cartwheels and at one time installed a trapeze above his desk on which he would perform gymnastic maneuvers. The trapeze was removed one day after Abbey, during one of his acrobatic spins, knocked off the fine silk hat of Fletcher Harper Jr., one of the Harper partners. Abbey's work had an immediate, positive effect on all the illustrators at Harper, for although still young, his mature skills, generosity, and wise artistic advice were well respected. He became a mentor to many of the new artists at Harper, including William A. Rogers.

Abbey profited greatly from his experience at Harper. He developed a keen sense of narrative composition. His amiability brought him together with other artists who shared his love of European history and art. Abbey, already a committed Anglophile, held the work of William Morris, William Frend De Morgan, and Alma Tadema in particular in high esteem, and their work had a great influence on many other young American artists as well. Along with Abbey, many of these New York artists, influenced by artistic developments in Europe, formed the "Tile Club," an informal and good-humored social group that met once a week in each others' studios to paint pictures on tiles. There were no dues, no officers, no bylaws, no teaching sessions, and no formal exhibitions; the only rule was that the group would not exceed twelve members (later increased to twenty), to insure the intimacy of the association. Abbey, known as "Chestnut" in the group, often played the piano at these merry gatherings–which grew to include many of the most prominent artists, architects, sculptors, and musicians of the day, among them Frederick Dielman (muralist, illustrator, and etcher), Frank Davis Millet (writer and painter), William Chase (painter), and Augustus Saint-Gaudens (sculptor).

Abbey's second term at Harper lasted two years. His diversity of illustrations for the publishing house was enormous. In addition to illustrations for literature and travel narratives, he also produced drawings for poems and children's stories, including a series of drawings for "Fizz and Freeze," "The Old Deacon's Lament," and "The Book of Gold," all appearing in *Harper's Monthly* in 1877. The 1878 Christmas issue of *Harper's Monthly* includes Abbey's illustrations for three Christmas poems, a serious story by Elizabeth Stuart Phillips, and a comic short story by Rose Terry Cooke. Although Abbey's remarkable versatility characterized his early career as an illustrator, his specialty was historical subjects. Also at this time Abbey completed his first mural painting–a vista of red roofs from a window–which adorned a small panel for the reception room at Harper.

The Centennial Exhibition of Art took place in Philadelphia in 1876. At that time Abbey was more impressed with the overwhelming contributions of English artists than with the productions of the American painters. He called the English section "a great eye opener." When, in late 1878, Harper offered Abbey the opportunity to travel to England to make background studies for his ongoing series of illustrations for Herrick's poetry and an article on Stratford-upon-Avon, he was enthusiastic, but he only consented after bargaining for more pay than was originally offered. After a send-off dinner with the Tile Club and an extravagant farewell banquet at Delmonico's restaurant attended by many of Abbey's fellow artists, he left New York in December 1878 on the vessel *Germanic*. While his original mission was only to gather enough material and English atmosphere to make his illustrations authoritative on British themes, he made England his home for the rest of his life, with only occasional visits back to America.

After arriving in Liverpool, Abbey traveled to Stratford-upon-Avon; checked into the Red Horse Hotel, where Washington Irving had slept; and went to work on illustrations for an article by William Winter about Shakespeare's birthplace. The resulting sketches appeared in the May 1879 issue of *Harper's Monthly*. Abbey was moved by the warmth by which he was received in England and intrigued by the new landscapes and people that he encountered. Writing home in a letter reproduced in Lucas's biography of the artist, Abbey wrote, "I've been so touched by the warm-hearted way perfect strangers have treated me here that I don't want any Englishman to go to America and meet with any less cordial reception." The trappings of old England were the foundation for his artistic inspiration. His imagination was invigorated by the quaint villages, gardens, hills, and architecture of rural England. This first English stay lasted three years. Hence, Abbey became a voluntary expatriate, though his American ties remained strong. Two artist predecessors to Abbey, Benjamin West and Charles Robert Leslie, had also come from Pennsylvania to make their careers in England.

In early January 1879 Abbey left Stratford for London. There he began to call on artists whose work he was familiar with through his connections at Harper. Among these artists were George Henry Boughton, Fred Barnard, and the English countryside painter Alfred Parsons, who became one of Abbey's closest friends and collaborators. These comrades were generous with their advice and support. The colorful painter James McNeill Whistler also became a close friend of Abbey.

Abbey continued to send illustrations back to America for Harper publications, which also had an English circulation. A set of nine drawings accompanied John Keats's "The Eve of St. Agnes" (first published in 1820) in the January 1880 issue of *Harper's Monthly*. Abbey's name first appeared in the table of contents of *Harper's Monthly* in May 1881, accompanied by some of his best illustrations for Herrick's poems. A friendship with writer William Black resulted in Abbey's illustrations of Black's *Judith Shakespeare,* which ran in *Harper's Monthly* throughout the year 1884. Despite his many contributions to the journal Abbey still suffered from money difficulties. At Harper illustrators were not paid per drawing but according to the size of the drawing when reproduced. Of course the illustrator had no control over the size that actually appeared in the pages of the magazine, a matter which often disturbed Abbey because diminishment of his drawings often ruined their beauty and effect. An artist could spend days on a particular detail that would later be cut out of the picture by a Harper editor back in the States or clumsily reproduced by an unpolished engraver.

Abbey also continued to contribute to exhibitions back in the States. An offshoot of the American Watercolor Society, the Salmagundi Sketch Club expressed the interests of illustrators, and its exhibitions featured illustrations and printmaking. The club was formed to highlight and gain respect for the work of illustrators. Its success was partly due to the American public's introduction to artwork through the great presses of the day and the technological developments that made art reproductions of respectable quality. The American public were becoming more sophisticated art connoisseurs. Abbey sent pen-and-ink drawings to the exhibition of the Salmagundi Sketch Club in 1880 that were again well received by critics, who admired their invention, range, and strength. After the third Salmagundi exhibition, *Scribner's,* the American publication with the most avant-garde taste in illustration, named Abbey one of the two most promising American figure artists.

During the first months of 1880 Abbey suffered from a serious stomach illness that rendered him bedridden and virtually incapable of any work. He did manage to produce illustrations for Herrick's poetry, his staple work that continued to appear in *Harper's Monthly*. Near the end of the year he continued work on illustrations for James De Mille's novel *A Castle in Spain* (1883), but he was still plagued by illness and money worries. The work on De Mille's book had actually begun in 1878; by 1880 Abbey grew tired of the project. The work was finally published serially in *Harper's Monthly* in 1883 and later in volume form, which included Abbey's illustrations.

In October 1888 Boughton and Abbey traveled to Holland. Their busy three-week journey took them throughout the Dutch countryside and to more than thirty towns, both of the artists making quick sketches along the way. The artists later developed the work from this excursion into *Sketching Rambles in Holland* (1885), a book that includes twenty-seven of Abbey's illustrations and also some from Boughton and John E. Rogers. Boughton's dedication reads "To Edwin A. Abbey, my fellow-rambler and fellow-sketcher, to whose delightful companionship may be set down any extra washes of couleur de rose that may be discovered in these pages by the cold sad cynic whose good fortune it has not been to ramble with such a perfect fellow-traveller this writing is inscribed."

His health improved, Abbey returned to New York in late September 1881. He resumed attendance at Tile Club gatherings and moved into a studio on west Tenth Street. At this time Abbey was working on various watercolors and continuing to submit drawings to Harper, primarily the Herrick illustrations. Along with other Tile Club members, Abbey was instrumental in putting together a successful (both artistically and financially) compilation of poems and illustrations for a Christmas 1882 issue of *Harper's Monthly*. Improvements in photomechanical reproductive techniques gave Abbey more control over the appearance of the final illustration on the page.

Abbey returned to England in May 1882 and traveled to Paris in June to see the Salon des Société des Artistes Français. Near the end of the year *Selections from the Poetry of Robert Herrick* was published. This was the book form of the poems and drawings that had first run in *Harper's Monthly* as a serial; it revealed Abbey's talents to a wide readership in both England and America. Art critic Frank Jewett Mather called it the finest illustrated book that had appeared in America up to its time. It was published in a luxurious art nouveau cloth binding of green,

Illustration by Abbey for Oliver Goldsmith's She Stoops to Conquer *(1887)*

gold, and cream. Also at this time Abbey commenced work on illustrations for Oliver Goldsmith's eighteenth-century farce *She Stoops to Conquer,* which began to appear in the pages of *Harper's Monthly* in December 1884 and ran until August 1886. These drawings reflect Abbey's interest in painting and lifelong practice of drawing true to period.

In the summer of 1885 Abbey visited the small village of Broadway in England, where he was to make his home for the next four years. There he shared a house, built in 1563, with Millet and his wife. Having completed drawings for *She Stoops to Conquer,* Abbey turned his concentration to work on *Old Songs,* a collection of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century ballad and folk-song lyrics that first appeared in *Harper's Monthly* in December 1886. He approached the work with firmness and vivacity.

His illustrations for Harper brought Abbey wide acclaim. In an article in *Harper's Weekly* for 4 December 1886, Henry James had high praise for Abbey's work: "His drawing is the drawing of direct, immediate, solicitous study of the particular case, without tricks or affectations or any sort of cheap subterfuge, and nothing can exceed the charm of its delicacy, accuracy and elegance, its variety and freedom, and clear, frank solutions of difficulties. If for the artist it is the foundation of every joy to know exactly what he wants (as I hold it is indeed), Mr. Abbey is, to all appearance, to be constantly congratulated."

James considered Abbey's illustrations for the oversized, richly embellished *She Stoops to Conquer* to be his best to date, and many shared his opinion. Goldsmith's drama was luxuriantly illustrated with sixty-nine of Abbey's black-and-white drawings, including ten full-page illustrations reproduced at Abbey's insistence by photogravure. James stated: "No work in black-and-white in our time has been more truly artistic and certainly no success more unqualified. The artist has given us a complete evocation of a social state to its smallest details, and done it with an unsurpassable lightness of touch." The actual drawings for *She Stoops to Conquer* were exhibited at the Grolier's Club in New York from 16 December to 22 December 1886; it was Abbey's first one-man exhibition.

Henry Mills Alden, editor in chief at *Harper's Monthly,* first contacted Abbey about illustrating Shakespeare's plays in 1886. In a letter to Abbey dated 18 February 1886 and reproduced in Lucas's biography, Alden wrote: "We have long had in view some drawings from you illustrating characters and situations in Shakespeare's *Comedies.* The thought first took shape when I saw your drawing of Autolycus. I would like to have your name go down to posterity associated with Shakespeare!" (The illustration that Alden refers to is of the singing peddler-thief from *The Winter's Tale* that accompanied Amelia Barr's article "Ballads and Ballad Music Illustrating Shakespeare." The article appeared in *Harper's Monthly* in June 1881.) In September 1887 Abbey wrote Charles Parsons that he was considering the idea and outlined the time and expenses the work would require. A fanatic for historical accuracy, Abbey often spent the bulk of his commission money on props and research materials. He demanded that books, costumes, and furniture be acquired for the drawings and also that he travel to the settings of the various stories so that he could take in the architectural monuments and landscapes. The contract for the illustrations was signed 17 March 1888. It stipulated that Abbey was to produce an average of seven pages for each of the fourteen comedies, or 132 drawings in all, at $125 per page. Harper retained ownership and copyright of the drawings.

From that point forward Abbey immersed himself in the task. He spent months studying the dress and architecture appropriate to the comedies and accumulated a large library of books by and about Shakespeare and the time periods of the plays. His chief source for costumes and props was Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc's six-volume compendium, *Dictionnaire raisonné du mobilier francais de l'époque carlovingienne à la renaissance,* published between 1858 and 1878 and in later editions. He also carried about with him pocket-sized volumes of the individual plays edited by the Reverend John Hunter and filled them with notes and sketches. Abbey did the vast majority of the illustrations for the comedies in pen and ink. During this same time pe-

riod Abbey was also working on illustrations for *The Quiet Life,* a group of poems celebrating life in the English countryside, and *Old Songs,* which ran in *Harper's Monthly* from 1886 to 1889. Both serials were later published in book form, *Old Songs* in 1889 and *The Quiet Life* in 1890.

In January 1888 Abbey traveled to Venice and Verona and brought back sketches of Venetian backgrounds for his upcoming work on *The Merchant of Venice.* Traveling through Germany and France, Abbey also purchased books, swords, and costumes in preparation for his Shakespeare illustrations. In June 1888 Abbey had his first exhibition in England at the Fine Art Society showing his drawings for *She Stoops to Conquer.* He also was persuaded to design costumes for a theatrical production of Victorien Sardou's play *La Tosca* staged in November 1889. Theatrical culture had always informed Abbey's work.

The Millets traveled to America in 1887 and brought a guest, Mary Gertrude Mead, back with them to Broadway in May 1888. Miss Mead was of English descent, had a degree from Vassar, and had traveled and studied widely in Europe. Abbey and Mead became close and eventually married. Their relationship remained powerfully strong throughout their lives.

After Mead had returned to America, Abbey left England again to join her in January 1890. They soon after became engaged, and Abbey, wishing to remain in America until his marriage, again took a studio in New York. Throughout the year Abbey worked in oils, watercolors, and pen and ink. He exhibited his work both at the Royal Academy in England and at the spring exhibition of the American Watercolor Society. He completed painting a large panel for the Hotel Imperial in New York, a mural titled "Playing Bowls in New Amsterdam." In addition he completed eight illustrations for *As You Like It,* which appeared in the December 1890 issue of *Harper's Monthly.* Even though the Tile Club had been disbanded, Abbey attended many social gatherings in the spring of 1890 in New York, Boston, and his hometown of Philadelphia. Surrounded by loyal friends, Abbey and Mead were married in the home of Mead's parents on 22 April 1890.

The illustrations for the Harper edition of Shakespeare's *Comedies* were accompanied by commentaries on the plays by Andrew Lang, a poet and recognized authority on the classics. Abbey and Lang, however, did not collaborate on their work. Lang's text was meant to be ancillary to the illustrations but is also a detailed critique of Shakespeare's writing. While most of the illustrations were done in pen and ink, Abbey also experimented with gouache drawings in grisaille using the photographic halftone process. A small percentage of the illustrations were done in charcoal, crayon, graphite, or a combination of media. Three illustrations for *Measure for Measure* were completed in oil and reproduced in halftone. The drawings appeared in various sizes and often on the same page with text.

Abbey's illustrations for Shakespeare, models of accurate learning and careful research, made his reputation. The illustrations began to appear in the pages of *Harper's Monthly* in November 1889. To herald the start of the series two drawings for *The Merry Wives of Windsor* also appeared in two other house publications, *Harper's Bazar* and *Harper's Weekly,* in November. Abbey became known to many as America's greatest draftsman. In his *Picture and Text* (1893) Henry James stated that "While the superficial qualities of Abbey's work can be imitated by anyone, his rendering of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which he has reconstructed so wonderfully, will never be approached on the lines he is following. His present position as an illustrator has been attained and maintained simply by treating illustration, as it should be treated, as seriously as any other branch of art." Abbey's drawings enhanced the masterpieces through masterful use of light and setting and demonstrated his expert ability to grasp and cultivate the dramatic essence of a scene or situation. In an article for *Scribner's Magazine* in August 1895, F. Hopkinson Smith noted, "Abbey in his art really has done what Wagner has done in music, Tennyson and the poets in verse. He has taken the old, retouched it, and made it new, giving us something infinitely better than the thing he found. An author's noblest work, his truest ideal may indeed be always safely trusted in his hands."

The year 1890 was a year of furious activity for the artist. With the encouragement of his wife and friends, Abbey consented to paint a series of murals for the Boston Public Library, which was then under construction. The trustees of the library took a chance on Abbey since he had little experience in painting murals, but his talent for telling a story recommended him. When Abbey and his wife left again for England in the summer of 1890, he carried with him a commission to provide the "Delivery Room" of the library with a frieze 180 feet long by 8 feet high, to include a series of designs chosen by the artist, and for which he would be paid $15,000, not a great amount of money for so large a project. Abbey settled on the Legend of the Holy Grail as the inspiration for his murals. The task occupied a great deal of his time for the next twelve years. In the end he told the story in a series of fifteen scenes set in the twelfth century.

After traveling to Italy in the spring of 1891, Abbey settled in the vine-clad country estate of Morgan Hall near Fairford, Gloucestershire, and constructed a huge studio in it. There he completed work on many illustrations for the Harper edition of Shakespeare's *Comedies*. Work also began in earnest for the Boston murals. For the next ten years Abbey traveled around Europe studying Romanesque architecture and dress for his Grail murals.

By 1894 half of the mural was complete. At this time Abbey also began to draw in pastels. Since he had completed the illustrations for the *Comedies,* Abbey was no longer under contract with Harper to produce more illustrations. However, he was still much in demand as a magazine illustrator. Edward L. Burlingame, the editor of *Scribner's,* asked Abbey to produce an Easter scene to be run in the April 1895 issue of the magazine, and Abbey acquiesced. Reproductions of some of Abbey's pastels appeared in the August 1895 issue of *Scribner's.* As technological developments in the photomechanical process advanced, so did Abbey's career. With improvements in the photomechanical line block process, an artist's work could be reproduced with little interference from engravers. With his fluid style Abbey was able to fuse his love of painting with his talents as an illustrator.

Abbey enjoyed sports; he spent many days rowing on the rivers of England and cycling. He also had a great enthusiasm for cricket, an outgrowth of his love of American baseball. He established an Artists' Cricket Club in England and often played in matches in the field he created around Morgan Hall. He found that the sport took his mind off painting and models and provided him with joy and relaxation. A Mr. Swinstead, writing of Abbey's love for cricket in a letter quoted in Lucas's biography, stated: "Abbey's enthusiasm for cricket was an outstanding feature in his broad and genial outlook upon life. This enthusiasm was quite in harmony with the intense vitality of his art. Being a man full of life and energy himself, he realized the danger of an artist becoming narrow-minded, rusty, and self-absorbed, and saw in the recreative effect of air and exercise the necessary physical and mental help to creative power." Lucas devotes an entire chapter to Abbey's love for the sport.

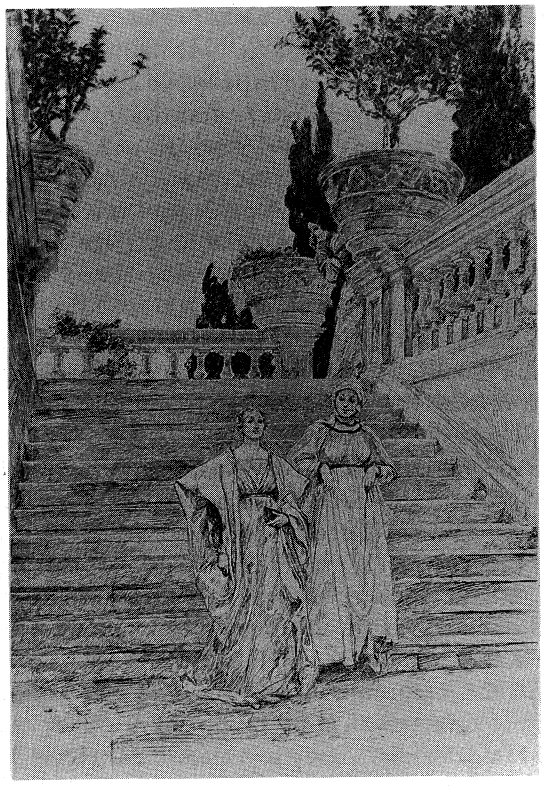
In 1896 Abbey was elected to an associateship in the Royal Academy, a great honor, especially for an American-born painter. The Royal Academy was the only art institution in England managed by artists without either government aid or outside help. Abbey was later promoted to Royal Academician in 1898, another rare occurrence for an American. Even though the English art establishment accepted Abbey and he thrived in its atmosphere, his American connections remained strong through both publication and exhibition.

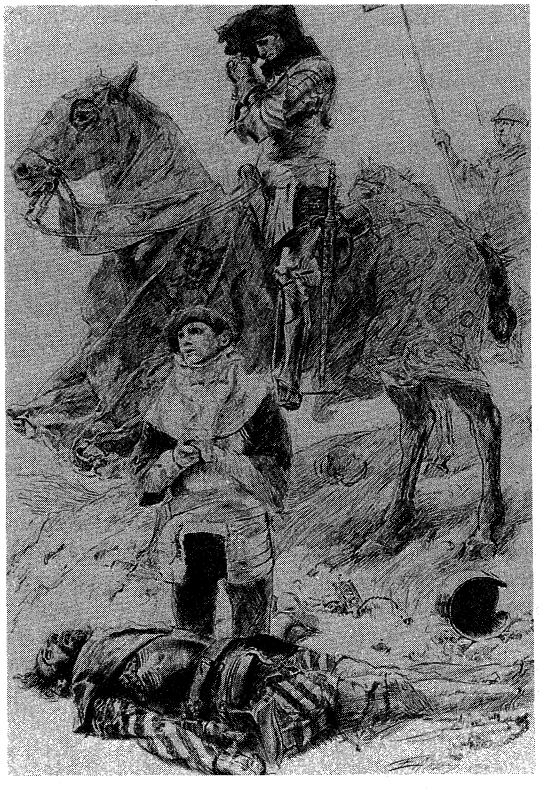
A Paris exhibition of the original drawings for Shakespeare's *Comedies* was held in 1896. It was well received with much fanfare. Also in 1896 Harper published Shakespeare's fourteen comedies including Abbey's illustrations. Published in four large octavo volumes and sold by subscription for $30 per set, only fifteen hundred sets were printed. Abbey's illustrations were reproduced in photogravure, an expensive and opulent method of book illustration. The cost to make and print the engravings was a little more than $4,000. Harper aggressively promoted the book and prominently featured it in the editorial pages of *Publishers' Weekly* and *Book Buyer.* Later, in 1899, Harper again offered for sale by subscription a limited edition of 750 numbered copies. Abbey earned about $34,000 altogether for the reproductions in the magazine and from additional royalty payments from the book.

Abbey returned to America to receive an honorary master of arts degree from Yale University in 1897. He was the first artist Yale had ever recognized by an honorary degree. This honor indicates the high esteem in which he was held by his contemporaries. The citation of the degree reads in part: "[Abbey's] genius as an illustrator . . . is inseparable from the power which enables him in imagination to produce life in past times. . . . But this power would be inadequate were it not allied with cultivation of a high order and patient researches."

On 1 January 1899 Abbey wrote John Hay, U.S. secretary of state and a friend from earlier meetings, protesting the heavy duty on imported works of art in America. Abbey lived in England because he was a student of English history, but his national loyalty remained to the country of his birth. The American tax on imported art made moving artworks into the country difficult for foreign or expatriate artists.

In March 1899 Abbey and his wife moved from Fairfield to Chelsea Lodge in London, where they lived for the rest of Edwin's life. He became somewhat distracted with city life, serving on committees, attending art meetings, and receiving guests such as Arthur Scribner, John Hay, Mark Twain, and his family from America. He also assisted in work on the panels of the House of Lords. In a letter (reproduced in Lucas's biography) to a Mr. Alden at Harper, Abbey stated: "I am asked to do all sorts of things–to serve on committees; to award prizes at schools; to judge Government competitions; preside at meetings; be president of things; and give advice to fond parents who think their children coming





Illustrations by Abbey for Much Ado About Nothing *(1891), from a series on William Shakespeare's comedies and tragedies created for* Harper's Monthly *(1890–1909)*

Raphaels, etc., etc., etc." He was forced to turn down much work because of these demands on his time, all of which he approached, however, with good humor.

Also in 1899 the sixteen illustrations for *Old Songs* won a gold medal at the world exhibition in Paris. Abbey had prepared the illustrations during a six-year period; they displayed moods varying from rapture to playful humor. The work on *Old Songs* was actually a collaboration with Alfred Parsons: in many of the illustrations Abbey drew the figures, and Parsons drew everything else. In all of the pictures Abbey distinguished himself with the exhaustive fineness of his pen and disciplined tonal organization.

Abbey completed the murals for the Boston Library in 1901, and the public flocked to see them in such numbers that the crowds often disrupted the services of the library. These murals remained the most popular ones in America for decades. Free from the responsibility of the Grail paintings, Abbey accepted a new commission from Harper to illustrate the tragedies of Shakespeare and Goldsmith's long poem *The Deserted Village*. The total number of drawings agreed on for the tragedies was one hundred. The contract, signed on 7 August 1901, stated that they were to be completed within six years, and Abbey would receive $50,000. The serialization of the tragedies in *Harper's Monthly* began with *King Lear* in December 1902, a holiday treat for readers.

Abbey had actually begun illustrations for *The Deserted Village* in 1899, but they were not published in *Harper's Monthly* until 1902. *The Deserted Village* was later published in book form, but Abbey was extremely disappointed in the quality of the book. In a letter to the publishers quoted in Lucas's biography, Abbey wrote:

> I must not defer longer in putting in my protest about the way you are treating my work. The get-up and arrangement of *The Deserted Village* book were a shock and a bitter disappointment to me. . . . I never dreamed that you intended to put forth the cheap and vulgar edition that you have published, in type that is simply barbarous, with a cover that is an eyesore, and paper to match—and this *before* a fine edition was done. The pictures were far better printed in the *Magazine* than they were in the book.

Abbey returned to Boston to oversee the final installation of the library murals in late 1901. While in America, Abbey received an honorary doctor of laws degree from the University of Pennsylvania and visited President Theodore Roosevelt in Washington, D.C. While he was in Philadelphia, civic leaders approached Abbey about decorating the state capitol at Harrisburg. Abbey did not accept at first, wanting to rest after just completing the Boston assignment, but this task eventually became the artist's dominating occupation for the rest of his life. He accepted the commission in 1904.

In March 1901 Abbey undertook by command of King Edward VII to paint the official picture of His Majesty's coronation, a great honor for the American artist. The ceremony took place in 1902, and Abbey was constantly busy with the fifteen-by-six-foot painting up until its completion in 1904. The sittings of all the famous people depicted in the painting took up considerable time. The painting was exhibited in various halls around England before it was hung in Buckingham Palace. The king offered Abbey a knighthood, but he declined the honor in order to retain his American citizenship.

A biographical pamphlet about Abbey by Elbert Hubbard was published in 1902. It was titled *Little Journeys to the Homes of Eminent Artists* and was filled with so many falsities that Abbey was often forced to dispel all of the lies that appeared within its pages. Hubbard even claimed that the Abbeys had more than nine children. (The Abbeys were childless.) Another book including biographical information on Abbey, *Famous Painters of America* (1916), written by J. Walker McSpadden, also includes inaccuracies, perhaps based on Hubbard's faulty work. Hubbard later admitted his ignorance of his subject, but *Little Journeys* was circulated widely. Hubbard confessed that he had actually never met Abbey and had made up the story about the Abbey children because the English countryside would seem drab to his readers without a lot of youngsters running around it.

Abbey became sick in May 1906, a sickness which he called "a bad cold on the liver" and which slowed his work on the Harrisburg decorations. Abbey's pressure on himself to create continually added to his illness. His illustrations for Shakespeare's tragedies continued to appear in the pages of *Harper's Monthly* at this time. After recovering, Abbey served as "Visitor" for the School of Painting at the Royal College of Art at South Kensington, where he served on the council from 1907 to 1910. He was a popular teacher and stressed to his students the importance of an education in history and architecture as well as precision and historical accuracy in drawing. Abbey traveled to Athens in 1909 to study for a painting on a Greek subject he had agreed to produce for the walls of the Curtis publishing company in his hometown of Philadelphia. He did not live to complete the project.

Abbey's series of illustrations for Shakespeare's tragedies for Harper came to a close with

the publication of *Titus Andronicus* in October 1909. Each of the illustrations filled an entire page, and nine of the illustrations were reproduced in full color from originals in oil and gouaches. Abbey was extremely unhappy with the quality of the reproductions of many of his colored works. The illustrations for the tragedies are accompanied by commentary from many poets, critics, and scholars. Critics considered the commentary dull, lifeless, and full of feeble theories. The series never appeared in book form because of problems with the format, the disappointing text, Abbey's own delays in completing the drawings, and perhaps changing public tastes. All in all, Abbey had produced a total of 71 illustrations for the tragedies and 133 for the comedies, a tremendous achievement. After 1909 Abbey worked almost exclusively on the Harrisburg decorations and a few works on canvas. In May 1910 Abbey played his last game of cricket.

Abbey had a busy social schedule in 1911 but suffered with his ailing liver. On 25 January, Abbey underwent exploratory surgery that revealed his liver had deteriorated. The surgeons could do nothing and gave him only a few months to live. Abbey's bed was moved into his studio, where he continued to direct his assistants until his death on 1 August 1911 at the age of fifty-nine. American ambassador Whitelaw Reid and many American friends represented his native land at his funeral. Members of the Royal Academy were also present to mourn the loss of their distinguished fellow member. Abbey's body was cremated and the ashes buried in the Old Kingsbury churchyard in England. John Singer Sargent, Abbey's close compatriot, supervised the completion of the murals at Harrisburg.

At the time of his death Abbey was a member of an astounding number of prestigious associations both in America and abroad. Among these were the National Academy of Design, American Watercolor Society, Society of Mural Painters of New York, the Royal Academy of London, and the Royal Bavarian Academy. He was a chevalier of the Legion of Honor of France; an associate of the Academie des Beaux Arts; a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries; an associate of the Royal Watercolor Society, London; and a member of the Royal Institute of Architects and the Society of Artists of Madrid, Spain. Abbey was also a member of the Century Club in New York; and in London of the Athenaeum, Reform, Arts, and Beefsteak clubs, and president of the Artists' Cricket Club.

Abbey was the foremost illustrator of the "Golden Age of Illustration" both in Great Britain and America. The reading public mourned the loss of so great an artist. Abbey's life and work were an inspiration to many accomplished artists who came after him. Vincent Van Gogh, Norman Rockwell, Charles Dana Gibson, Fred Pegram, Sidney Paget, and many others claimed that Abbey's illustrations positively influenced their careers. His exhaustive knowledge of legend, literature, history, and fiction, together with the great passion and skill he had for uniting pictures and text, endeared him to professionals and the general public alike. His workmanlike methods and thoroughness of research set the standards by which other artists labored. The range and fertility of his art were marks of his refined genius, for his illustrations, watercolors, pastels, oils, and mural paintings all attained conspicuous success. Abbey was, simply, one of the most talented illustrators who ever lived and a brilliant storytelling painter.

Bibliographies:

Annette Ward, "Abbey's Illustrations of Shakespeare's Comedies," *Bulletin of Bibliography,* 11 (January 1920–April 1932): 141–142;

Theodore Bolton, *American Book Illustrators: Bibliographic Check Lists of 123 Artists* (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1938);

Michael Felmingham, *The Illustrated Gift Book: With a Checklist of 2500 Titles* (Aldershot, Hampshire, U.K.: Wildwood House, 1989).

Biography:

E. V. Lucas, *Edwin Austin Abbey, Royal Academician,* 2 volumes (New York: Scribners, 1921).

References:

Nancy D'Anvers Bell, "The Work of Edwin Austin Abbey, R.A.," *Artist,* 29 (January 1901): 169–181;

"Books and Bookmen," *Harper's Weekly,* 47 (21 February 1903): 313;

Lorinda Munson Bryant, *American Pictures and Their Painters* (New York: John Lane, 1917);

Charles Caffin, *American Master of Painting: Being Brief Appreciations of American Painters; Illustrated with Examples of Their Work* (New York: Doubleday, Page, 1902);

Royal Cortissoz, *American Artists* (New York: Scribners, 1932);

Cortissoz, "The Art of Edwin Austin Abbey," *Scribner's,* 85 (February 1929): 230–238;

Charles DeKay, "Abbey and His Art," *Harper's Weekly,* 55 (12 August 1911): 8–9;

Edwin Austin Abbey, Exhibition Catalogue by Kathleen Foster and Michael Quick (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1973);

"Edwin Austin Abbey: The Record of His Life and

Work," *Arts & Decoration,* 16 (January 1922): 248–251;

Eugene Exman, *The House of Harper* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967);

Kathleen Adair Foster, "Makers of the American Watercolor Movement: 1860–1890," dissertation, Yale University, 1982;

Arthur Hoeber, "Edwin A. Abbey, N.A., R.A.," *Bookman,* 34 (September 1911): 24–34;

Hoeber, "Edwin Austin Abbey, Illustrator, Painter, Decorator," *International Studio,* 44 (October 1911): 55–62;

A. Holman, "Abbey: The Man and His Work," *Craftsman,* 21 (October 1911): 11–22;

Samuel Isham, *The History of American Painting* (New York: Macmillan, 1905);

Henry James, "Edwin A. Abbey," *Harper's Weekly,* 30 (4 December 1886): 786–787;

James, "Our Artists in Europe," *Harper's Monthly,* 79 (June 1889): 54–57;

James, *Picture and Text* (New York: Harper, 1893);

Frank Jewett Mather, *Estimates in Art: Sixteen Essays on American Painters of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Holt, 1931);

Robert Mowat, *Americans in England* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1935);

Lucy Oakley, *Unfaded Pageant* (New York: Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery, 1994);

Mary Rosetta Parkman, *High Adventurers* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1931);

Walt Reed, "Illustration in America, 1890–1900," *Graphus,* 272 (March–April 1991): 88–91;

W. A. Rogers, "Abbey at Franklin Square," *Colophon,* part 6, no. 2 (1931);

Homer Saint-Gaudens, "Edwin Austin Abbey: The Career of a Great American Artist," *World's Work,* 16 (8 May 1908): 10191–10204;

Marc Simpson, "Reconstructing the Golden Age," dissertation, Yale University, 1993;

Simpson, "Windows on the Past: Edwin Austin Abbey and Francis David Millet in England," *American Art Journal,* 22, no. 3 (1990): 64–89;

F. Hopkinson Smith, *American Illustrators* (New York: Scribners, 1892);

Smith, "The Pastels of Edwin A. Abbey," *Scribner's,* 18 (August 1895): 137–147;

Henry Strachey, "The Art of E. A. Abbey," *Harper's Monthly,* 100 (May 1900): 875–884.

Archives:

The principal collection of Abbey's artwork and correspondence is located in the Abbey Collection at the Yale University Art Gallery. Other public collections include those at the Corcoran Gallery of Art (Washington, D.C.), the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), the Boston Public Library, the Liverpool Museum (England), and the Cape Town Museum (South Africa).