

COWPER'S WOODMAN ILLUSTRATED

An important sidelight on Cowper is the range and quality of the illustrations of his poems and environment in editions and other books, by artists including Richard Westall, Henry Fuseli, John Flaxman, and J. and H.S. Storer, the latter, father and son, being responsible (with John Greig) for the celebrated *Cowper Illustrated* (1803) and, an expanded version of this, *The Rural Walks of Cowper* (1822), which even today are ideal guides to the countryside round Olney and Cowper's favourite haunts. It is perhaps less widely recognized that representations of scenes and figures from the poetry were separately published. *John Gilpin* proved a popular choice, with nine different prints issued between 1784 and 1833, the year in which an etching by 'Phiz' (Hablot K. Browne), illustrator of Dickens, appeared. Three prints, 'two of Crazy Kate, and one of the Lacemaker in "Truth"', are mentioned by Cowper as 'lately published' in a letter to Lady Hesketh on 3 November 1787. The most interesting of such items, however, relate to the description of the woodman and his dog near the beginning of Book V of *The Task*, 'The Winter Morning Walk'. It is these I wish to make note of, together with a modest but attractive recent discovery.

'The Woodman and his Dog, from Cowper's *Task*' was among the famous paintings of Thomas Barker (1769-1847), known as 'Barker of Bath', and is listed as 'No. XVIII' in *The Gallery of Poets ... Catalogue of the Fourth Exhibition of Pictures, painted for T. Macklin, by the Artists of Britain; illustrative of the British Poets and the Bible*, 1791, and in the *Catalogue of the Fifth Exhibition*, 1792. Barker's work was ubiquitously copied onto other materials, among them pottery, cotton, and linens. The engraver Francesco Bartolozzi produced a print of 'The Woodman'; but, more unusually, the *Dictionary of National Biography* and Norma Russell's *Bibliography of William Cowper* (Oxford, 1963) record that a needlework version was embroidered by Mary Linwood (1755-1845), a renowned worker in that medium, who in 1798 established an exhibition that was still open in London in 1841, containing one hundred copies of pictures by old and modern masters.

I have lately seen for sale a fine—and costly—needlework of Barker's painting and an unsigned copy in watercolour. Could the former be Mary Linwood's? Though so far unattributed, it should hang in a museum! I have myself had the good fortune to acquire another, entirely first-hand, rendering of Cowper's passage. This is a drawing in black pencil and red crayon ('sanguine'), 13 x 16 inches, and evidently by a talented amateur. It is signed 'G.A. Radcliffe' and dated '1835'; on the reverse is the title, 'The Woodcutter', and an inscription, 'H[?]. Radcliffe Given by her Niece August 1836'. The original sprang to mind as soon as I saw the piece: the woodman with 'axe' and 'wedge', the 'fragrant tube / That fumes beneath his nose', the snow and 'forest drear', the short-tailed dog that is 'half lurcher and half cur', and other relevant detail. The whole drawing seemed to capture the intimate and understated mock-heroic humour of Cowper's lines. It was a nice surprise, nonetheless, to get certain confirmation of the relationship when, some weeks later, I spotted in minute pencil marks within a gnarled root at the fore of the picture—the phrase 'vid. Cowper'!

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