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# “Kéramos” in *Harper’s*: The Contexts of Global Collection

CHRISTA HOLM VOGELIUS

In December of 1877, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s “Kéramos,” a narrative poem documenting international styles and techniques of pottery manufacture, was published for the first time in *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*.<sup>1</sup> Though Longfellow is rarely considered through the networks of his relatively infrequent magazine work, the *Harper’s* edition of the poem, republished the next year in *Kéramos and Other Poems* (1878), demonstrates how such attention can shed light on conflicting ambitions in the poet’s career and in the history of the magazine.<sup>2</sup> Eliciting a series of gently concerned letters from the *Harper’s* editor, and printed only a few issues before Elizabeth Corbett’s satirical excoriation of international collecting in “Aunt Kerammik’s Art Studies,” “Kéramos” appears in the monthly at a turning point in American periodical publication.<sup>3</sup> In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Arnoldsian notions of personal culture and cultivation were increasingly defined by an awareness of anthropological “cultures.” Longfellow’s artistic embrace of international modes of ceramic production shows the poet positioning himself, however tentatively, as a high cultural figure. Editorial hesitation within *Harper’s* about this global focus demonstrates the monthly’s uncertain placement in a changing periodicals market. And the humble ceramic pot becomes an emblem of the divided impulses in late-century American art collecting.

“Kéramos” locates the seemingly prosaic topic of ceramics collection within the social and business networks of publication in a way that showcases the complexity of both spheres. The printing of the poem within *Harper’s*, in relation to other publications by the Harper and Brothers firm, reveals the publishing house’s unified perspective on American ceramics collecting. Harper and Brothers publications on collection show a nationalistic bias that is reliably Anglo-American in emphasis. The consistency of this bias makes firm business sense: the presentation of “Kéramos” in *Harper’s* serves to promote other apparently similar publications within the Harper and Brothers imprint. But the poem itself, which took inspiration from non-Western works, reveals a more

international aesthetic when read beyond the context of its magazine publication. "Kéramos," in fact, lies at the intersection of some of the conflicting late-nineteenth century perspectives on collection that manifested themselves through the networks of popular print.

At first glance, *Harper's* seems a publication perfectly consistent with what Margaret Fuller called Longfellow's "middle class" ideals.<sup>4</sup> The magazine was one of the most widely circulated American periodicals in the second half of the nineteenth century, and its broad, middle-brow audience aligned with Longfellow's own. The editor-in-chief after 1869, Henry Mills Alden, was a man whose character and aims strikingly recall the poet's. A receptive figure whose disordered office was always open to visitors, Alden considered *Harper's* as a magazine "addressed to all readers of average intelligence, having for its purpose their entertainment and illumination."<sup>5</sup> This aim toward the average American led some critics to contest that the magazine stooped toward mediocrity, a claim that also was leveled against Longfellow's popular verse. Furthermore, the magazine's position as a cultural translator of European works for an American audience (or, one could say, a mass reprinter of British texts) corresponded to Longfellow's own role of bringing foreign literatures to American readers through translation or poetic reinterpretation. Though *Harper's* after the Civil War increasingly commissioned works by native-born authors and prided itself in the discovery of new talent, some still criticized the magazine, as many criticized Longfellow himself, for being too European in influence.

But if Longfellow and *Harper's* seemed to share the same goals and apparent shortcomings, a reading of "Kéramos" in the context of its print networks demonstrates some discrepancies in their attitudes toward international artistic traditions. On Longfellow's part, "Kéramos" shows an early adoption of globalism that is clearly culturally coded. The poem describes scenes of ceramic creation in the Netherlands, France, Spain, Italy, Egypt, China, and Japan, dedicating as much time to the non-Western sites as to the European and marking the progression from West to East as a return to the origins of pottery as an art form. This was at a time when, as Brad Evans writes, "the circulation of something like 'cultures' became a sign of 'Culture' . . . ; the contact with or appreciation of this kind of multiplicity was a mark of being 'cultured'."<sup>6</sup> Though the term "cultures" in an anthropological sense would not be in use until the early twentieth century, the late nineteenth century saw its early formulation through a curiosity about international traditions and practices among the American elite, the kind of interest dramatically exemplified by Longfellow's son Charles, whose extensive travels made the poet's own house in Cambridge the site of one of the earliest American collections of Asian furnishings, decorative arts, and ceramics.<sup>7</sup> The categories of high culture and global cultures, Evans argues, emerged "not only at the same time, but in many of the same venues, such that we might say the interplay between them became largely codeterminative."<sup>8</sup> Longfellow's early allegiance to artistic globalism brings

with it an allegiance to the emerging high culture of international collection, whatever others might say of his “middle class” status.<sup>9</sup>

To say that *Harper's* was making similar claims for itself in publishing “Kéramos,” though, would be to simplify what was in fact a transitional moment in its history. Discussing *Harper's* participation in a proto-anthropological idea of non-Western cultures, Evans categorizes the monthly as one of “America’s elite literary magazines.”<sup>10</sup> This categorization is debatable by the 1880s, but, in the 1870s, as the contradictions surrounding “Kéramos” clearly show, *Harper's* was still unsure of its status in a changing marketplace. Internationalism may have been a shibboleth of developing high culture, but nativism was the bread and butter of *Harper's* business model and its middlebrow audience. The contradictions that attend both Longfellow’s “Kéramos” and *Harper's* uneasy decision to publish the poem reflect analogous tensions in the larger realm of cultural collection and collecting culture.

### Longfellow, *Harper's*, and “the Collectors of Pottery or Porcelain”

The divided interests of *Harper's* are clearly illustrated in the exchanges between the magazine’s editor and Longfellow, leading up to the poem’s publication. Even as Henry Mills Alden embraced the contemporary relevance of “Kéramos,” he encouraged Longfellow to make textual changes that would have placed the poem in line with the publishing house’s more conservative interests. And when he agreed to publish the poem without these changes, he printed “Aunt Kerammik’s Art Studies” only a few months later as a direct antidote to Longfellow’s relatively progressive attitude toward international collecting.

Longfellow’s history with *Harper's Monthly* dates back to its first issue in 1850, and his history with the publishing firm reaches back fifteen years earlier. Harper and Brothers, under the leadership of brothers James, John, Wesley, and Fletcher, first published Longfellow’s two-volume travel narrative *Outre-Mer* in 1835 and then a collection of his poems in 1846. In 1849, when the brothers were planning the publication of the magazine, Longfellow was the first writer they contacted to solicit original content and advice. Given that *Harper's* was first conceived primarily as a means of publicizing the Harper and Brothers name—or, as Fletcher Harper said, “a tender to our business”—this outreach to one of their most successful writers was well calculated.<sup>11</sup> No response from Longfellow is preserved, but given that his work was not printed in these early issues, his reaction can be surmised.

By the late 1840s, the poet was well past the point in his early career when he had earned an equal income from—and showed an equal interest in—book and magazine work. His attention had shifted clearly toward the book industry in 1845, when he purchased the stereotype plates for his existing volumes and

began to do the same for new publications. This practice allowed Longfellow to charge publishers for reprinting his work rather than merely receiving a flat fee for payment of copyright, and, ultimately, he nearly doubled his income from the standard rate of payment.<sup>12</sup> The ensuing focus on volume publication did not merely distract from magazine work; it discouraged it since the creation of salable editions depended on the collection of original work. The first edition of *Harper's*, then, did not include a contribution by Longfellow but did reprint a short profile of the writer from a Dublin periodical.<sup>13</sup>

The international tenor of this profile, which focuses on Longfellow's German influences, is telling of the magazine's interests. In its infancy, *Harper's* was primarily a miscellany, or, as George Rex Graham chided, "a good foreign magazine," reprinting works wholesale from British newspapers and periodicals.<sup>14</sup> When the magazine began to shift in the mid-1850s toward paying American authors for their contributions, it nonetheless maintained a European, and particularly British, focus. Longfellow's works in the monthly, all of them from his late-career period of 1875 to 1880, are illustrative of this inclination. The six poems, which include "Vittoria Colonna," "Robert Burns," and the folksong "The Sifting of Peter," focus on European subject matter. Even "Morituri Salutamus," a poem that Longfellow published for the fiftieth anniversary of his graduating class at Bowdoin, worked within a framework of references to Greek and Roman history.

"Kéramos," with its more global influence, is a subtle exception. Christoph Irmischer suggests that the refrain of the poem is inspired by the Persian poem *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, translated in several nineteenth-century editions by Edward FitzGerald.<sup>15</sup> Later printings of "Kéramos" point to this connection; an advertisement from the *Pottery and Glassware Reporter*, for instance, prints the first stanza of Longfellow's poem next to a quotation from the *Rubáiyát*.<sup>16</sup> Both poems consider the idea of God as a potter and human existence as emblemized by the building up and breaking down of ceramic works. In addition, Longfellow's primary historical source, Albert Jacquemart's *History of the Ceramic Art* (1873), devotes a significant amount of its time—about half of the nearly four-hundred-page volume—to non-Western work. Jacquemart traces the development of ceramic art through Egypt to Asia and finally to the West, providing an overview of the development of pottery traditions from the place of their oldest known manufacture to their most recent development. But this overview does not offer a narrative of progress so much as an analysis of the cultural forces at each time and place that shaped the creation of different types of ceramic work. As Jacquemart writes in the introduction, the study of the works in his volume will lead to an acknowledgement that "things have everywhere had a common origin, and that similar experiment everywhere led to analogous results and progress."<sup>17</sup> In fact, for Jacquemart, who sees an alignment between spiritual and aesthetic development, it is not surprising "to find the choice of the materials to be in inverse ratio to the progress of time,

China, Japan, India, Persia and Egypt using porcelain and stoneware long before Greece covered with her elegant decorations the coarse, porous earth now used only for the commonest purposes."<sup>18</sup> In other words, pottery is both a universal art and one whose particularities reveal the differences between the societies that produced it. It is a litmus test for social development and, as such, a means by which to introduce readers to different histories and peoples.

The singularity of the poem's influence did not preclude *Harper's* interest, but the magazine had different aims than the poet's sources. Alden offered Longfellow a thousand dollars for the right to publish the poem, a figure that Longfellow called "an ample remuneration," and that—especially given the limited guarantees of copyright—speaks to the work's perceived value.<sup>19</sup> Its primary significance for *Harper's* lay in the contemporary relevance of ceramic art; an American vogue for collecting had grown exponentially over the past decade and was only further sparked by the vast pottery exhibits of the 1876 World's Fair in Philadelphia. At the same time, pride in American manufacture was at stake. While the exhibits of international ceramic ware at the Fair were a subject of commentary for many reviewers, American firms made a poor showing. The book-length *Gems of the Centennial Exhibition* does not so much as mention American ceramics.<sup>20</sup> A review of the ceramics exhibits for *Appleton's* mentions only "our own yet backward state in this branch of industrial art."<sup>21</sup> "Kéramos," then, could be seen as both a point of interest for American collectors and a call to arms for American potters.<sup>22</sup>

At the same time, *Harper's* may have seen the international tenor of the poem as an opportunity, albeit one that they only embraced with some hesitation. In the late 1870s, the magazine underwent significant organizational changes, and its focus would shift over the next decade due both to internal and external pressures. For the first quarter-century of its existence, the de facto editor of *Harper's* was Fletcher Harper, who oversaw details of policy and management. As George Curtis, a regular columnist and close friend of Longfellow's, wrote, Fletcher was "anxious above all that [*Harper's*] should be popular in a high and generous sense. . . . He had in view 'the people,' 'the plain people,' and not philosophers and poets."<sup>23</sup> Henry Mills Alden succeeded Alfred Guernsey as editor-in-chief in 1869, but Fletcher continued to exert a strong influence until his retirement in 1875, and a lesser one until his death two years later. 1877 was a turning-point for the magazine, then, and some changes suggest some slight distinctions between Fletcher's and Alden's aims. *Harper's* had felt a strong market pressure from *Scribner's Monthly* since its founding in 1870; the magazine competed for the same audience and often outperformed *Harper's* in the crucial area of aesthetics. In 1877, *Harper's* improved the quality of its paper, and two years later it altered its layout for readability. In illustration, competition was increasingly fierce, and *Harper's*, at times, claimed to have paid as much as five hundred dollars for an engraving.<sup>24</sup> Given these pressures, it is conceivable that the international tenor of "Kéra-

mos" offered *Harper's* an opportunity to distinguish itself, moving further into a direction of "philosophers and poets" than Fletcher Harper's original vision would have allowed.

If this shift in mission was part of what attracted Alden to "Kéramos," the historical record nonetheless registers only hesitation. The editor, in a letter regarding the poem, gently suggests that Longfellow might consider including references to Wedgwood, a British ceramics company that was both influential to American tastes and well-represented at the Centennial. To this suggestion, Longfellow replies, "In writing Kéramos I thought of Wedgwood, and also of Sevres and Dresden. Upon due consideration it seemed best not to come down so far, but to confine myself to the origin of the art. I did not see any way of treating picturesquely these more modern potteries."<sup>25</sup> This somewhat hedging answer reveals the rift between the poet and the editor: while Alden envisions the poem as appealing to the modern collector and craftsman with references to contemporary European work, Longfellow sees the poem as a philosophical history, following Jacquemart's lead.

This distinction becomes even more apparent in the ensuing discussion about illustration. Longfellow, always keenly interested in the aesthetic appeal of his work, wrote to Alden with a list of seven engravings, "among others," that he would like to see reprinted as illustrations.<sup>26</sup> Five of these are from Jacquemart's volume, and one each is from Arthur Beckwith's *Majolica and Fayence* (1877) and Margaret Oliphant's *Makers of Florence* (1876). The images that Longfellow cites are beautifully detailed engravings of ceramic objects and vessels, often works explicitly referenced in the text. But while Longfellow had final say about the inclusion and exclusion of the poem's references, he did not much influence the illustrations. *Harper's* was known for its detailed and plentiful wood engravings and employed some of the best artists in the trade, including Edwin Austin Abbey, one of the illustrators assigned to Longfellow's work. Ultimately, only one of the poet's suggestions, a ceramic plate of Cana the Beautiful from Beckwith's volume, appears in the monthly.

The others were replaced by engravings that may not have been as technically accurate as the representations that Longfellow suggested but did accomplish the end of marking the text as a *Harper's* publication. And, in 1877, being a *Harper's* publication still meant following a relatively conservative aesthetic. These engravings are very clearly focused on scene setting, including, for instance, an image of a potter at his wheel, a landscape from the Dutch countryside, and a still life of vessels on top of a tiled fireplace. As wood engravings, these works could be set on the same page as the type, allowing the illustrator to compose them so that they framed the text. One stanza is set inside a tiled fireplace while on nearly every page the images wrap around or divide sections of text, acting as what Hugh Amory terms "proprietary illustration"—these images could not be easily printed out of context by other magazines, and the text, if reproduced, would lose its defining imagistic feature.<sup>27</sup> The feathery

illustrations that frame “Kéramos” are a far cry from the more daring covers and posters that *Harper’s* and *Scribner’s* (then *Century*) would produce in the 1890s under the influence of the aesthetic movement.<sup>28</sup>

But business, rather than aesthetic, concerns were most central to the magazine’s rejection of Longfellow’s suggestions. The illustrations that Longfellow proposed were divided between steel engravings (which would need to be printed, at greater expense and on a separate page) and woodcuts (which could be integrated into the setting of the type). Longfellow may not have considered this difference, but the editors almost certainly did. Even more crucially, the American edition of Jacquemart’s book was printed by Scribner, Armstrong and Co., the publishing house behind *Scribner’s Monthly*. *Harper’s* may have moved beyond its early position as a “tender for [the] business,” but it still strongly supported the interests of Harper and Brothers. While many other contemporary monthlies made a large part of their profits through advertising—including advertisements for the publications of competing firms—*Harper’s* refused to accept any advertisements apart from those for its own works until 1882.<sup>29</sup>

Harper and Brothers, furthermore, was planning its own book-length entries into the growing field of ceramic studies. These volumes, both published in 1878, offer a further motive for the magazine’s commission of Longfellow’s work and also provide a sense of what Alden saw—or wanted to see—in “Kéramos.” The first of these, *Pottery and Porcelain of All Times and All Nations*, by William Prime, takes clear inspiration from Jacquemart: both authors provide an ambitious international survey of the field from its earliest days to contemporary times. But Prime’s book is designed specifically for an American audience and, even more specifically, for collectors and would-be collectors. It is organized not by geographical region, as is Jacquemart’s, but by ceramic type, serving to educate potential buyers about the given market.<sup>30</sup> Harper’s second book, *The China Hunters Club*, strikes a similar note. Written as the anonymous chronicle of a northeastern ceramic club’s formation and dissolution, it is even more specifically focused, answering questions such as “what kinds of pottery and china our grandmothers used, [and] how far the short but wonderful history of Ceramic Art in England is exemplified in American houses.”<sup>31</sup> It touches only in passing on traditions apart from the American and the English.

The exclusive focus of these books provides a clear context for Alden’s petitioning for the inclusion of more Western European styles in “Kéramos.” But this particularized focus is also part of the larger story of American ceramics collecting in the 1870s and 1880s. Ceramics collecting in the nineteenth century grew out of a national interest in traditional, hand-crafted American objects, an interest that had begun nearly a century earlier. At the end of the eighteenth century, local historical societies began to form with the goal of collecting and preserving American antiquities, including books, manuscripts, and household objects. At the fore in 1791 was the Massachusetts Historical Society, followed

by the New York Historical Society in 1804. Groups of serious individual collectors of antiquities grew throughout the century, especially in New England, where a longer local history facilitated the discovery of collectibles.<sup>32</sup> Such historical collecting, as J. Lockwood writes, was often driven by a nativist as well as an aesthetic sensibility: "In saving china, collectors often imagined themselves to be recovering a story of Anglo supremacy and to be defending it against the threat of foreigners as well as the threat of lower-class rural Anglos, both of whom were considered incapable of stewarding the nation's historical treasures."<sup>33</sup> Collectors were often depicted as rescuing abused and ill-preserved ceramics from farmhouses in New England and beyond. Much American collecting was centered on the ceramics of the northeast states, as well as Northern Europe and Asia, which had provided England and America with their first models for porcelains.<sup>34</sup>

Harper and Brothers' 1878 books on ceramics both reflect this general model of collecting. *Pottery and Porcelains of All Times and All Nations* purports to hold an international focus but does so only in the context of American collectors. It contains a section exclusively devoted to American ceramics, with a subsection on American collecting and collectors. The overall geographic distribution of the volume is heavily weighted toward America and Western Europe, with only about one hundred of the five hundred-plus pages dedicated to non-Western ceramics. *The China Hunters Club* likewise reflects the interest in an Anglo-European history, with an eye toward a future that is equally nationalistic:

With whatever disdain the collector of Dresden and Sevres may now look down on the blue-printed crockeries of Clews and Wood and Ridgway, the day will come when Ceramic specimens showing our first steamships, our first railways, the portraits of our distinguished statesmen, soldiers, and sailors, the openings of our canals, the various events of our wars, and our triumphs in peace, will rank in historical collections with the vases of Greece.<sup>35</sup>

Given this tone, it is not surprising that the book's chapter on "Pottery and Poetry" makes no mention of Longfellow's more globally-oriented work. If "Culture" and "cultures" were becoming increasingly synonymous, Harper and Brothers seems to stake its claims firmly with philistinism.

"Kéramos" is set apart from nationalistic surveys of ceramics through its relentless focus on objects, not as collector's items but as exemplars of the aims of art more broadly. The first line of Jacquemart's introduction is instructive: "A philosopher, seeking among the products of human industry the one which would enable him to follow . . . the approximate measure of the artistic tendencies of man, would select incontestably the works of the potter."<sup>36</sup> This stance becomes apparent in "Kéramos" as Longfellow's poetic descriptions build to a

general statement of artistic ideals at the end of the poem. “Kéramos” portrays ceramics as, in their ideal form, so loyal to nature that they become indistinguishable from it. The ceramic wares of Delft “Are beautiful with fadeless flowers, / That never droop in winds or showers, / And never wither on their stalks” (67). In Imari, “The stork, the heron, and the crane / Float through the azure overhead, / The counterfeit and counterpart / Of Nature reproduced in Art” (77). These descriptions of nature in art—or nature artistically described—culminate in this truism near the end of the poem: “He is the greatest artist, then, / Whether of pencil or of pen, / Who follows nature” (78). Following Jacquemart’s lead, the ceramics described are taken as emblems of “the artistic tendencies of man” and ultimately bolster a naturalistic doctrine of art.

This is where the illustrations of Longfellow’s poem—both those that *Harper’s* used and those that Longfellow would have used—can help us to understand some of the larger aims of the poem. The illustrations created for the *Harper’s* edition, whatever their other merits or shortcomings, do represent the poem’s conception of art as following nature. While many of the early engravings focus on human figures—such as the large image of the well-muscled potter in the opening engraving or the image of the potter Palissy stoking the fire of his kiln—in later images, these figures shrink in relation to the pottery with which they are depicted until, with the section documenting Eastern ceramics, the ceramic pieces have taken over the entire frame of the image. The first engraving from China shows a detailed illustration of some delicate plants and small butterflies. In the background of this image is the faint outline, almost imperceptible at first glance, of a very large platter and vase whose edges exceed the border of the image. In the second image from China, a large ceramic platter, depicting some buildings and a natural scene, is propped in the grass. A pagoda, which the text reveals to be the Porcelain Tower of Nankin, is drawn hazily in the background, confusing the line between art and reality. This confusion is taken to its logical end with the final large image in Japan, which portrays herons flying over a sunset, as seen through reeds in the foreground. The setting reads as a natural landscape, but the accompanying poem complicates this assumption by noting that these landscape features “are painted on these lovely jars” (77). Ultimately, it remains unclear whether this last image is of the ceramic work or of the landscape that inspired it. These final images make tangible the blurring of the line between nature and art that Longfellow’s final stanzas stress, the sense that nature itself is “the counterfeit and counterpart / Of Nature reproduced in art” (77).

But this dictum is only the culmination of the speaker’s text and is ultimately the more conservative aspect of the poem. “Kéramos” is composed of two “intertwined” voices: that of the main speaker and that of the Potter, whose song introduces and concludes the narrative (66). This second voice finds little representation in the *Harper’s* illustrations, though it is central to dictating the movements of the poem. The sight of the Potter at his wheel, sing-

ing his song, is the direct inspiration for the speaker's international visions of ceramic history: "This wizard in the motley coat / Transported me on wings of song" (66). If the culmination of the speaker's argument is a statement about the interrelation of nature and art, the Potter's song stresses the cyclical nature of life; each segment of his song but the last begins with the refrain, "Turn, turn my wheel." The more general philosophical nature of these segments anchors Longfellow's poem in the broader investigations of Jacquemart's volume. For Longfellow, as for Jacquemart, clay is a symbol for the earthly condition, its plasticity embodying the necessity for constant change. At the same time, the metaphor of individuals as clay emphasizes the universality of a human experience in which all people are composed of the same essence. As a late section reads: "The human race, / Of every tongue, of every place, / Are kindred and allied by birth, / And made of the same clay" (74).

Longfellow seems to have recognized the potential conflict between his general audience and these sections of the text. In a letter to James Fields shortly before the poem's publication, the writer is both boastful and distrustful of his work's wide circulation: "The poem 'Kéramos' has gone to the Harpers, who will harp it in one hundred and fifty thousand households, or say half a million ears, if they will only listen to such music as comes from a Potter's wheel."<sup>37</sup> Judging from the elision of the potter's song from the magazine illustrations, Longfellow's concerns were merited. The broader textual contexts of the monthly only further discouraged attention to statements of global egalitarianism.

### The Contexts of "Kéramos"

The equal weight of Western and non-Western works in Longfellow's poem is not reflected in the publication contexts of "Kéramos." Editions of *Harper's New Monthly* from 1877–78 betray a strong Western European bent. In the edition of *Harper's* in which "Kéramos" was printed, a handful of other articles centering on material and fine arts culture were published—including an article on "Elizabethan and Later English Furniture" by Harriet Spofford and another article on Venetian tapestries—but none stray from Europe. An overview of *Harper's* from 1877–78 betrays these same inclinations, with a series on the "Old Flemish Masters" dominating the art commentary, supplemented by travel narratives with titles such as "In Alsatia" and "Segovia and Madrid." In line with this bias is "Aunt Kerammik's Art Studies," whose title and broad outline recalls "Kéramos" but whose storyline takes the narrative of non-Western art collection in a much different direction.

Elizabeth Corbett's story was published in the March 1878 issue of *Harper's*, between the appearance of "Kéramos" in the magazine and its publication in book form later that year. Like "Kéramos," "Kerammik" is a root for the

English word “ceramic,” and both works are concerned with international art collecting. That, however, is where the similarities end. Corbett was a lesser-known writer than Longfellow but was more frequently published in *Harper’s*, writing twelve works of poetry and fiction for the magazine from the late 1870s to 1880s. “Aunt Kerammik’s Art Studies,” not surprisingly, then, corresponds better to the overall tendencies of the magazine than “Kéramos,” balancing out some of the global idealism of this earlier work. The story follows a wealthy middle-aged widow (“Aunt Kerammik”) and her devoted grown nephew and heir, Frederic, who narrates. The close relations between the two shift as the aunt becomes entranced by a volume of home decoration, *First Steps in Household Art*, which embraces both the medievalism and the orientalism associated with the Arts and Crafts movement. Aunt K. begins to strip down her apartment, first removing her furniture and paintings, then replacing gaslight with candle light, and furnace-heat with a burning fireplace. Artworks in a European tradition, such as two paintings “by Greuze and Bouguereau,” are replaced by “old china plates” and “Japanese cabinets” which, the aunt argues, “are perfectly in keeping with the tone of the apartment” (749–50). This “tone” is a parody of nineteenth-century exoticism: a small dirty rug, purported to be “the prayer rug of an Arab chief,” appears on the floor, “piles of skins” take the place of couches, and “stuffed birds, horns, and huge shells” figure as decorative elements (750–51).

Frederic is appalled by these changes. Though his disgust is at least partially financial—Aunt K. funds these expensive objects through the small fortune that was to be his inheritance—his disparagement of the aesthetic shift carries a distinctly xenophobic tinge. His aunt’s enthusiastic discussion of her new principles of design appears to him as “an unknown tongue,” and she herself describes her apprenticeship as learning of the “alphabet” of Art (749). The objects are tainted with the nephew’s prejudices: a wall-hanging said to have belonged to William the Conqueror has a smell “as one might expect to obtain by distilling half a dozen tenement-houses and as many emigrant ships, and bottling the result” (752). The distastefulness of the foreign is concentrated in the character of Professor Salaam, a “little sallow, thin man, with inquisitive black eyes and a large nose,” who appears near the end of the story to sell the aunt what he claims is rare petrified egg, such as that in “the history of Aladdin and the roc’s egg” in the *Arabian Nights* (752, 753). The professor embodies the idea, palpable throughout the story, of non-Western inauthenticity as he asks Aunt K. in his thick accent for “the chayck for the twanty-five thousand dolars” (752). He is able to make off with the money only shortly before the so-called egg, suspended from the ceiling, falls, striking Aunt K., and “burying her in a cloud of white suffocating dust and countless fragments of plaster” (753). The shock breaks her arm and her infatuation both, and, on her recovery, she has her apartment restored to its former state and plans a restorative vacation with her nephew in the reassuringly banal form of a “Continental Tour” (753).

The aunt's return to her Eurocentric senses is represented in the course of the story as a true return to sanity—the nephew was determined, before his aunt's independent recovery, to consult a family physician about his relative's "mental condition" (751). The aunt's movement from Orientalist infatuation to European tour is neatly opposed to the narrator's travels in "Kéramos," which proceed from West to East in search of the originary forms of ceramic art. While in "Aunt Kerammik's Art Studies" the anonymity of non-Western art represents a threat to authenticity, in "Kéramos" this same anonymity signals this work's purity and its adherence to natural forms. The breaking of the egg in "Aunt Kerammik" is evidence of this object's fraudulence, but a corresponding event in "Kéramos" holds precisely the inverse meaning.

"Kéramos," like "Aunt Kerammik," ends in the breaking of pottery, but fragmentation in this context is a sign of the object's value rather than its fraudulence. The final lines of the poem are from the Potter's song and emphasize the cyclical nature of existence: "Behind us in our path we cast / The broken potsherds of the Past, / And all are ground to dust at last, / And trodden into clay!" The breaking down of pottery is a sign of the material's unique ability to change with the changing world and to reshape itself into a new form. It is difficult not to think of Jacquemart here, particularly his discussion of the "plastic nature" of the art, which, he writes, was discovered when "man, walking upon the clayey soil, softened by inundations of rain, first observed that the earth retained the print of his footsteps."<sup>38</sup> As Christoph Irmscher notes, these lines also echo *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, which figures God as a potter and considers the vessel's fate of being "trampled back to shapeless Earth again."<sup>39</sup> In this sense, these last lines emphasize the value of ephemerality through a pointedly non-Western framework.

If both Corbett and Longfellow's views of non-Western art are limited by their tendency toward caricature, it is nonetheless clear that, for Longfellow, far-sightedness and a literal ability to see, as he writes, "regions far remote" are intimately connected (66). The placement of "Kéramos" in *Harper's* and the discussions leading up to this placement allow us to appreciate what was at stake in embracing this view. While Longfellow has long been understood to be—and has been criticized for being—an American poet unusually invested in the European past, this poem showcases this investment as part of a larger global concern, a reaching back through a history that includes the non-European world. The breadth of this interest contrasts strikingly with work such as "Aunt Kerammik's Art Studies"; *Harper's* publication of both in quick succession demonstrates the uncertainty of their editorial vision in the last years of the 1870s. Longfellow's willingness to work with Alden though their differences suggests a similarly conflicted perspective on his part. In "Kéramos," he may have asserted a globalism that was still the province of the elite in the late 1870s, but his decision to publish the poem in *Harper's* sealed its middle-brow fate.

As is always the case with Longfellow, the cultural context in which he published and the norms that he seemed so comfortably to inhabit threaten to efface the particularities of his argument. The influence that medium might have on the work's reception is exemplified in a large, cream-colored pitcher that now sits in a cabinet of the Longfellow-Craigie House in Cambridge. The pitcher, emblazoned with Arts and Crafts style detailing, a sketch of Longfellow's bearded face, and the titles of some of the poet's most celebrated works, was a personal gift from a Boston ceramics dealer. The offering must have struck the poet as a little incongruous—and not just because his solemn face looks out of place on the side of a milk jug. The commemorative object performed a more significant misstep: it was inspired by the composition of "Kéramos" but manufactured by none other than Wedgwood, the British ceramics company that Longfellow insisted could not fit "picturesquely" within the scope of his work. The transformation of a poem concerned with ancient origins into an occasional object by a contemporary firm is an irony of its history. But it is also emblematic of the way that Longfellow and many other popular nineteenth-century poets have been passed down to us: as glib, marketable objects, easy to comprehend if somewhat awkward to modern eyes. The text of "Kéramos" and the networks of its publication challenge the uncritical packaging of such works. To truly figure "Kéramos" as a pitcher is to dream up something more whimsical, organic, and impractical than Wedgwood could possibly have profited from. That Longfellow was able to do so is a testament to the compelling contradictions of his career.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "Kéramos," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 56, no. 331 (1877): 65–79. Subsequent citation of this work will appear parenthetically within the text.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Kéramos and Other Poems* (Boston: Osgood, Houghton, & Company, 1878).

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Corbett, "Aunt Kerammik's Art Studies," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 56, no. 335 (1878): 749–53. Subsequent citation of this work will appear parenthetically within the text.

<sup>4</sup> Margaret Fuller, "Poems: By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow," in *Papers on Literature and Art* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1846), 152.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Connery, "Henry Mills Alden," in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, vol. 79, *American Magazine Journalists, 1850–1900*, ed. Sam Riley (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale Group, 1989), 17–26.

<sup>6</sup> Brad Evans, *Before Cultures: The Ethnographic Imagination in American Literature, 1865–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 7.

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed treatment of Charles Longfellow's travel and collecting practices, see Christine Guth, *Longfellow's Tattoos: Tourism, Collecting and Japan* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004). The "objects" that Charles Longfellow collected included ceramics, furnishings, photographs, and a full-back tattoo of an Asian carp.

<sup>8</sup> Evans, *Before Cultures*, 25–26.

<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, Margaret Fuller, "Poems," 152. Fuller calls Longfellow "a middle class" poet, a label that was certainly not intended as complimentary but, rather, aimed to reflect the

poet's middle-ground position between the high-cultural elite and the disposable pulp writing of the lowbrow.

<sup>10</sup> Evans, *Before Cultures*, 24.

<sup>11</sup> Lucy Heckman, "Harper's Magazine," *Serials Review* 7, no. 1 (1981): 50.

<sup>12</sup> William Charvat, *The Profession of Authorship in America, 1800–1870*, ed. Matthew Bruccoli (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1968), 158–60.

<sup>13</sup> "Longfellow," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 1, no. 1 (1850): 74.

<sup>14</sup> Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1850–1865* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938), 387.

<sup>15</sup> Christoph Irmscher, *Longfellow Redux* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 129.

<sup>16</sup> Irmscher, *Longfellow Redux*, 136–37.

<sup>17</sup> Albert Jacquemart, *History of the Ceramic Art: A Descriptive and Philosophical Study of the Pottery of All Ages and All Nations*, trans. Mrs. Bury Palliser (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Low and Searle, 1873), 2.

<sup>18</sup> Jacquemart, *History of the Ceramic Art*, 2–3.

<sup>19</sup> Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *The Letters of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, vol. 6, ed. Andrew Hilen (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 289.

<sup>20</sup> George Titus Ferris, *Gems of the Centennial Exhibition* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1877).

<sup>21</sup> Susan Carter, "Ceramic Art at the Exhibition," *Appleton's Journal: A Magazine of General Literature* 1, no. 1 (1876): 75.

<sup>22</sup> Irmscher, *Longfellow Redux*, 125.

<sup>23</sup> Mott, *A History of American Magazines*, 391.

<sup>24</sup> Mott, *A History of American Magazines*, 397.

<sup>25</sup> Longfellow, *Letters*, 298.

<sup>26</sup> Longfellow, *Letters*, 289.

<sup>27</sup> See Meredith McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834–1853* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 28.

<sup>28</sup> Evans, *Before Cultures*, 126–35.

<sup>29</sup> Mott, *A History of American Magazines*, 14.

<sup>30</sup> William Prime, *Pottery and Porcelain of All Nations and All Ages* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1878).

<sup>31</sup> Annie Trumbull Slosson, *The China Hunters Club* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1878), 5.

<sup>32</sup> J. Samaine Lockwood, "Shopping for the Nation: Women's China Collecting in Late-Nineteenth-Century New England," *New England Quarterly* 81, no. 1 (2008): 64–67.

<sup>33</sup> Lockwood, "Shopping for the Nation," 70.

<sup>34</sup> For everyday use, most late nineteenth-century American ceramics were imported from England. See George L. Miller, "Marketing Ceramics in North America: An Introduction," *Wintertthur Portfolio* 19, no. 1 (1984): 1–5, for a discussion of trends in American purchases from the late eighteenth century into the nineteenth. See, also, Susan Lawrence, "Exporting Culture: Archaeology in the Nineteenth-Century British Empire," *Historical Archaeology* 37, no. 1 (2003): 20–33, for a comparative analysis of American purchasing tastes.

<sup>35</sup> Slosson, *The China Hunters Club*, 8.

<sup>36</sup> Jacquemart, *History of the Ceramic Art*, 1.

<sup>37</sup> Longfellow, *Letters*, 288.

<sup>38</sup> Jacquemart, *History of the Ceramic Art*, 1–2.

<sup>39</sup> Omar Khayyám, *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám, the Astronomer-Poet of Persia*, trans. Edward Fitzgerald, 3rd ed. (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1872), 22.

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