

Lewis Foulke Thomas (1808-68), c. 1845

Attr. John Peter Frankenstein (1817-81)

oil on canvas

28 x 22 1/4 (71.12 x 56.52)

Gift of Martha Thomas Corwine Pelton, 1933

Weis 125

Hewes Number: 131

Ex. Coll.: Sitter; possibly to his sister Belle Thomas Corwine (1822-88); owned by her daughter, the donor.

The writer Lewis Foulke Thomas was a younger brother of Frederick William Thomas (cat. 120). Like his brother, he studied law and worked in the newspaper business. In the 1830s, he assisted the family with the production of the Commercial Daily Advertiser in Cincinnati, Ohio, and also worked for that city's Daily Evening Post. He left Cincinnati in 1836 and moved to Kentucky, where he was editor of the Louisville Daily Herald until 1839. He travelled throughout the Midwest but eventually settled in Washington, D.C., where he practiced law until his death in 1868.

In 1841 Thomas edited The Valley of the Mississippi: Illustrated in a Series of Views..., a nine-installment journal that featured pictorial lithographs of cities, topography, and significant architecture in the Ohio and Mississippi River valleys. Thomas was also a poet, and the volume containing his epic poem, Inda, A Legend of the Lakes (1842), features a frontispiece portrait of the author. Examples of his other books are preserved in the first editions collection of the American Antiquarian Society.

Thomas, like his brother, befriended the poet Edgar Allan Poe (1809-49). The manuscript of Thomas's poem To Florence (1844), owned by the Society, is inscribed in his hand: 'The above was republished by Edgar A. Poe in the Broadway Journal. To me, he praised it very highly. It was the medium by which we became acquainted.' Neither as famous as Poe's works, nor as great in number, the writings of the Thomas brothers have been described as representative of the beginning of the nation's Midwestern school of literature.¹

This portrait of Lewis Foulke Thomas was painted about 1845, probably by John Peter Frankenstein. Several members of the Frankenstein family, including John's brother and father, were active as artists in the Cincinnati area. Born in Darmstadt, Germany, Frankenstein came to

the United States with his parents in 1831. After serving an apprenticeship with a local engraver, he set up his own studio and began painting portraits that were considered by critics to be excellent likenesses.² From 1839 to 1843, Frankenstein was based in Philadelphia, often exhibiting his work at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts.³ He added landscape painting to his repertoire and also studied sculpture. This portrait of Thomas was probably painted during Frankenstein's years of itinerancy, when he travelled from Philadelphia seeking commissions in Kentucky, Ohio, Massachusetts, Quebec, and elsewhere. He eventually settled in New York City.⁴

¹ Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft, eds., American Authors, 1600-1900 (New York: H. W. Wilson and Co., 1938), 740-41.

² Charles Cist, Sketches and Statistics of Cincinnati in 1859 (Cincinnati: n.p., 1859), 202.

³ Anna Wells Rutledge, The Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, 1807-1870 (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1955), 75-76.

⁴ For more on Frankenstein, see Edward H. Dwight, 'John P. Frankenstein,' Museum Echoes 27 (July 1954): 51-53; and The Golden Age: Cincinnati Painters of the Nineteenth Century (Cincinnati: Cincinnati Art Museum, 1979), 74-75.