



The Courtship of Miles Standish

©2009 eNotes.com, Inc. or its Licensors. Please see [copyright information](#) at the end of this document.

Places Discussed

*Plymouth. First English settlement in North America. A village at the time in which this poem is set, Plymouth was built on the vacant townsite of the Pawtuxet Indians on the southeast coast of what became Massachusetts. Longfellow describes the village in such a way as to make the reader feel a part of it. The site's earlier Pawtuxet occupants died from smallpox, which had apparently been contracted through contact with English fishermen in the area. The wooded areas mentioned indicate the widely scattered nature of the settlement, allowing room for gardens and growth, both of which were vital to the frontier setting.

Longfellow uses the region's rugged coastline to establish a feeling of finality among Plymouth's colonists. The rocks, especially famous Plymouth Rock, represent both stability and hope for John Alden.

Wheat field. Longfellow's use of this field is a constant reminder of the danger posed by local Native Americans. In early 1621 the field was planted over the graves of settlers who had died during the winter, supposedly so that the Indians would not know how many English settlers had perished. This dead reportedly included Rose Standish, the wife of Miles Standish, and most of the family of Priscilla Mullins.

Bibliography:

Arvin, Newton. *Longfellow: His Life and Work*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1963. Sees *The Courtship of Miles Standish* as an unpretentious domestic comedy, presented with simple truthfulness, appropriate Puritan coloration, and biblical imagery.

Ferguson, Robert A. "Longfellow's Political Fears: Civic Authority and the Role of the Artist in *Hiawatha* and *Miles Standish*." *American Literature* 50 (May, 1978): 187-215. Interprets John Alden as representing both the helpless, authority-fearing artist and the personally conflicted Longfellow himself. Interprets Miles Standish's admiration for Julius Caesar as intended to be an unpleasant characteristic.

Wagenknecht, Edward. *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: His Poetry and Prose*. New York: Ungar, 1986. Praises *The Courtship of Miles Standish* for its faultless narrative flow, skillfully evoked atmosphere, unflinching plot elements, and detailed, realistically presented, and developed characters. Asserts that the work neatly balances comedy and serious drama.

Williams, Alicia Crane. "John and Priscilla, We Hardly Knew Ye." *American History Illustrated* 23 (December, 1988): 40-47. Explains that, although John Alden and Priscilla Mullins were elevated by Longfellow to legendary status, biographical information concerning the real pair is sketchy. John, a cooper who became a civil officer, and Priscilla, who inherited considerable money, married about 1623 and by 1650 had eleven children.

Williams, Cecil B. *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*. New York: Twayne, 1964. Provides a detailed plot summary of *The Courtship of Miles Standish* that includes carefully chosen quotations. Extols the work as part of America's cultural heritage and refers to Longfellow's journals for details about the work's

The Courtship of Miles Standish: The Courtship of Miles Standish

composition.

Copyright Notice

©2009 eNotes.com, Inc.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution or information storage retrieval systems without the written permission of the publisher.

For complete copyright information, please see the online version of this work:

<http://www.enotes.com/courtship-miles-standish-salem>