CHAPTER 2

By way of the illustrated editions that helped spread literary culture in eighteenth-century England, the sisterhood of the arts was brought home to a public that never visited the exhibitions. In 1688 and 1709 respectively, the leading bookseller-publisher of the time, Jacob Tonson, had issued editions of Paradise Lost, with designs by the Flemish artist John Baptist Medina, and of Shakespeare's plays, edited by Nicholas Rowe and illustrated by the French artist François Boitard. These were followed by editions of such dramatists as Beaumont and Fletcher (1711) and Dryden (1735). Plates from Tonson's Shakespeare later were sometimes used for cheap printings of the individual plays that were sold at the playhouses. In one form or another, as expensive mezzotints, cheap colored prints, or engravings bound into reading editions of the plays, these engraved representations of dramatic tableaux found an audience composed not only of the well-to-do and presumably cultivated persons who could afford the collected works of a dramatist but of the larger body of ordinary playgoers as well. The scenes, however, were "generalized theatrical constructs" inspired by the printed text. At no time in the century, indeed, did book illustrations of drama often purport to be based on performances. Typically occurring on the engraved title page of a play, surrounded by an elaborate border, the scenes were usually unrelated to the play as staged or to its actors, whose portraits also accompanied the text. Only occasionally did they incorporate details that seemingly were suggested by theatrical productions.

The demand for these illustrated texts of old or currently popular dramas—in the latter case often rewritten by the playwrights before printing, so that they might be read as novels composed solely of dialogue—accounts in part for the steady increase in the production of
theatrical portraits and tableaux toward the end of the century by such specialists as DeWilde and Roberts. Newly published volumes of belles lettres, however, were not usually illustrated. It has recently been pointed out that of some 1,850 poems separately published between 1704 and 1724, only a dozen had plates. Conspicuous among the latter was *The Rape of the Lock* (1714), which had five engraved tableaux and a frontispiece by Louis du Guernier. The first edition of Swift's *A Tale of a Tub* to be illustrated (with eight engravings) was the fifth (1710). The first edition of *Robinson Crusoe* had only a portrait of the shipwrecked mariner and a map, but the sixth edition of the first part and the second edition of the second part (both 1722) were illustrated.

Throughout the century, illustrations were so expensive an item in the initial production of a book that publishers normally commissioned them only when the success of a certain title suggested that an illustrated edition might attract additional buyers. (Once made and paid for, however, they could be, and often were, reused in subsequent editions over long periods of time.) Sometimes a publisher sought the advice of the book's author. Thus in 1727, Swift's publisher asked him to name the episodes of *Gulliver's Travels* that he thought should be illustrated in a new edition, and Swift responded with a list of twenty-two in all. Some twenty years later, Sir Thomas Hanmer acted, in a sense, as Shakespeare's deputy when he gave Francis Hayman directions for twenty-seven of the illustrations he was commissioned to draw for Hanmer's new edition of the plays. Hayman later contributed pictures and vignettes to a wide variety of literary works—editions of Pope, Milton, Congreve, and Addison; the *Spectator*, *Tatler*, and *Guardian*; *Roderick Random*, Christopher Smart's *Poems on Several Occasions*, *The Beggar's Opera*, and *Young's Night Thoughts*. In the 1760s, the first book illustrator to do so, he sent several pictures to exhibitions of the Society of Artists, of which he was the first president.

Hayman's career ended (1776) just as cheap illustrated editions of the works of standard authors, old as well as recent, began to multiply in the wake of a court decision in 1774 that, by abolishing the concept of perpetual copyright, threw into the public domain a large body of literature that certain publishers had hitherto claimed as their exclusive property. In addition to separate editions of single works and collections of individual authors' oeuvres, several enterprising publishers brought out long series of pocket-sized volumes with the same contents. Their low prices, convenient formats, and illustrations recommended them to many middle-class readers whom the generally high prices of books had barred from participating in the steady expansion of the reading public. (W. Jackson Bate has argued that “the potential audience for poetry in the period from 1770 to 1830 was greater than it had ever been since the invention of printing.”) The principal series in the 1770s and 1780s were John Bell's *Poets of Great Britain Complete from Chaucer to Churchill*, his *British Theatre*, and John Harrison's *Novelist's Magazine*, a “select library” of fiction issued in parts. In the 1790s, Bell reissued his two long series, along with his 1774 edition of Shakespeare, at the new low price of 6d. a volume, and another member of the trade, John Cooke, brought out his *Cheap and Elegant Pocket Library of Select Poets*, *Pocket Edition of Select Novels*, and *Select British Classics*. As a group, these enterprising publishers widened the public's acquaintance with scores of poets, dramatists, novelists, and essayists. Cooke's editions particularly won the affection of young students who could pay no more than a weekly sixpence for good reading.
"How I loved those little sixpenny numbers containing whole poets!" exclaimed Leigh Hunt late in life. "I doated on their type, their ornaments, on their wrappers containing lists of other poets, and on the engravings from Kirk."9

Thomas Kirk, who illustrated certain titles in all three of Cooke's series, and John Hamilton Mortimer, who contributed frontispieces to eight or ten volumes of Bell's edition of the poets and illustrated at least nine scenes from The Canterbury Tales, were two of the half-dozen prominent artists who both worked as book illustrators and sent paintings, some commissioned by publishers as designs for engraving, to the yearly exhibitions. Others whose names were familiar to gallerygoers in the last decade of the eighteenth century and the first three of the nineteenth were William Hamilton, who contributed ten plates to Bell's Shakespeare and illustrated, among others, the poems of Thomson and Gray; Robert Smirke, who worked for all of the leading publishers and sent pictures to the Academy exhibitions from 1786 to 1813; Richard Corbould, whose designs also could be found in a number of reprint series; Richard Westall, who in his later years would be among the first to illustrate the new stars of poetry, Scott, Southey, and Byron; and the best known and most prolific of the group, Thomas Stothard. Tradition credits Stothard with some 5,000 designs, of which 3,000 were engraved.* (The scores of paintings he contributed to the exhibitions probably were both oils and watercolors.) He was the most adaptable and accommodating of artists. His admirer, the early Victorian painter Charles Robert Leslie, wrote, without exaggeration: "He was engaged in every species of composition, from illustrations of Homer and Shakespeare, to designs for spelling-books and pocket-almanacks, fashions for the Ladies' Magazine, portraits of popular actors and actresses in character, as well as other subjects of the day."10 Whatever his private tastes in literature may have been, he was ready to turn his hand to whatever commission a publisher of illustrated books offered him, beginning with 148 designs for Harrison's Novelist's Magazine. The list solely of the works of English literature he illustrated runs to many scores of titles, far too long to reproduce here. A list of the works he did not illustrate would probably occupy less space.

Although each artist's style has a distinctiveness readily apparent to the specialist's eye, to the uninitiated the work of the whole group tends to blur into a general impression of mannered elegance and artificiality, of prettiness rather than strong emotion, of decoration rather than representation. For the strong rococo element in their designs they were indebted to the century's most influential engraver in the field of book illustration, Hubert François Gravelot, who illustrated about one hundred books, including Gay's Fables and Theobald's edition of Shakespeare, during his residence in England (1732–45). Gravelot was a student of Boucher and the teacher, in turn, of Hayman and Gainsborough, and through his association with the St. Martin's Lane Academy, he transmitted the French elegance of line to the next generation of English literary illustrators and beyond.

Hazlitt, writing of Westall, delivered an estimate that well describes the limitation of the whole group of busy literary illustrators. Westall's style, he said, was

the elegant antithesis to the style of Hogarth, where, instead of that originality of character which excludes a nice attention to general forms, we have all that beauty of form which excludes the possibility of character; the refined essence

*His commercial success somehow seems incompatible with the gentle other-worldliness attributed to him by his affectionate and admiring contemporaries. In a lecture in the mid-1840s, Benjamin Robert Haydon exclaimed, "Peace to Stothard's mild and tender spirit! It was impossible to be in Stothard's company a moment, without feeling he possessed the mind of some eternal being that was out of place on this dim spot which men call earth... Stothard always impressed you as if he was trying to forget the evils of earth" (Lectures on Painting and Design, 2:33–34). Lamb wrote a verse tribute to him:

In my young days
How often have I, with a child's fond gaze,
Pored on the pictur'd wonders thou hadst done:
Clarissa mournful, and prim Grandison!
All Fielding's, Smollett's heroes, rose to view;
I saw, and I believed the phantoms true.

Age, that enfeebles other men's designs,
But heightens thine, and thy free draught refines.
In several ways distinct you make us feel—
Graceful as Raphael, as Watteau genteel.
Your lights and shades, as Titianesque, we praise;
And warmly wish you Titian's length of days.
25. Francis Wheatley, *Young Marlow and Miss Hardcastle* (1791) (Victoria & Albert Museum, Crown Copyright). This scene from Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773) was painted for the edition of the play published in *Bell’s British Theatre* (1792). The money to be made from producing designs to be engraved in collections like Bell’s often induced artists to work in veins some distance from their customary ones (compare Mortimer, pl. 12). Little of the fanciful elegance that characterizes Wheatley’s work is evident here.

PAINTINGS FROM BOOKS

and volatilized spirit of art, without any of the *caput mortuum* of nature; and where, instead of her endless variety, peculiarities, and defects, we constantly meet with the same classical purity and undeviating simplicity of idea—one sweet smile, one heightened bloom diffused over all.¹¹

The fact was that the alien spirit of Watteau and the Frenchified disciples of the “little Dutch masters” presided over the illustration of English books down to the end of the eighteenth century and for several decades beyond. The endless variety of English literature was sacrificed to the featureless, derivative stylization of native artists who had not yet found an illustrative idiom of their own.

Their influence on subsequent literary art amounted almost to an incubus. In his memoir of his brother David, a painter who died young, William Bell Scott recalled that “perhaps [his] first attempts at original design were suggested by the illustrations to Cooke’s edition of the British Poets, Novelists, and Essayists—a complete set of proofs of these in ten or twelve volumes being his daily companion” about 1822.¹² At the same time, however, as Scott noted many years later, this enthusiastic, absorptive study was in the long run unhealthy, for it inhibited the free exercise of the imagination, binding the reader (especially the reader who was about to become an artist) to past standards and styles of expression.¹³

It is true that book illustration in the age of Stothard and Westall was not quite all of one piece. There were idiosyncratic practitioners such as
Thomas Rowlandson, an exhibitor at the staid Royal Academy between 1791 and 1818 (one of the more surprising facts of English art history), who made colored plates for editions of Smollett, Sterne, Fielding, *Hudibras* (after Hogarth), and *The Vicar of Wakefield*. At the opposite pole from Rowlandson in most respects was William Blake, who in his professional capacity engraved a number of Stothard's designs. However original his style as an independent literary illustrator, chiefly in watercolors, his choice of subjects—or that of the publishers for whom he worked—was wholly conventional: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Gray's poems, Young's *Night Thoughts*, Milton, *The Canterbury Tales*, *The Faerie Queene*. Not all of these were engraved, and some were not even meant to be published. Several Shakespearean drawings, for instance, were for an extra-illustrated copy of the second folio owned by the Reverend Joseph Thomas. Again the selection of subjects is unremarkable. By the time Blake got around to them, in 1806–9, Jaques and the wounded stag, Richard III and the ghost, and Queen Katherine's dream were staples of literary illustration. In this respect, at least, Blake was a captive of custom, not a visionary dissident remote from the everyday life of English art. But neither Blake nor Rowlandson made any impact on literary painting. It was the Stothards, Westalls, and Smirkes who determined the way English literature was to be presented in visual form to the readers of illustrated editions and, to a large extent, in the paintings offered at the exhibitions down to the Victorian era. Additionally, the wide circulation of their engravings, between the covers of books as well as separately, opened the eyes of a new generation of artists to the seemingly limitless artistic potentiality of literature.

In 1743, in his epistle complimenting Sir Thomas Hanmer on his edition of Shakespeare, the poet William Collins expressed this aspiration:
O might some verse with happiest skill persuade
Expressive Picture to adopt thine aid!
What wondrous drafts might rise from every page!
What other Raphaels charm a distant age!

Thus, generous critic, as thy bard inspires,
The sister arts shall nurse their drooping fires;
Each from his scenes her stores alternate bring,
Blend the fair tints or wake the vocal string.15

However acceptable they might be on their own terms, engraved frontispieces, such as those by Hayman in Hanmer's edition, were a poor substitute for what Collins had in mind, the illustration of Shakespeare in paintings so accomplished—Raphaels indeed!—as to do honor to their incomparable source and at the same time to serve as an exemplary justification of ut pictura poesis. But although a fair number of scenes from Shakespeare had appeared at the yearly exhibitions during their first two decades, not until the 1780s were there signs that Collins's dream might be fulfilled on the scale and with the grandeur that Shakespeare's preeminence among British poets clearly required.16

At that time, the growing popularity of engravings as visual realizations of dramatic texts combined with Shakespeare's popularity on the stage and, of late, in the exhibition rooms to inspire three similar projects. The first was abortive and the second completed, but neither had much influence on public interest in literary art. The third, however, conceived and financed on an opulent scale, would have a profound effect on the practice of literary illustration.

The abortive project dated from 1781, when the fifty-year-old Robert Edge Pine,17 a portraitist whom some regarded as Reynolds's rival and a history painter who had won the Society of Arts' hundred guinea prize for "the best historical picture painted in oil colors" (The Surrender of Calais to Edward III), announced that he was about to paint "some of the most interesting and pleasing scenes in the works of Shakespeare" with a view toward engraving them and selling them in pairs. The first subjects, already painted, were Ophelia's mad scene and Miranda's first sight of Ferdinand. These and three other pictures, two from King Lear and one from As You Like It, were exhibited in Spring Gardens in 1782.18 How many paintings were added to the collection is not known, but two years later Pine emigrated to the United States with the principal intention of producing a series of historical paintings illustrating the late Revolution. (He actually made portraits of leading Revolutionary figures, including George Washington and his family, General Gates, and Baron von Steuben.) With him he brought some or all of his Shakespeare pictures, which were hung at the State House in Philadelphia, the first such art exhibition in American history. After his death in 1788, they were sold to a Boston museum keeper and were burned in 1803.

Pine's Shakespeare paintings were not engraved, despite his prospectus. But in 1783 an album of prints entitled The Picturesque Beauties of Shakespeare, Being a Selection of Scenes, From the Works of that Great Author began to appear. When it was completed four years later it contained forty plates, four to each of ten plays, of which thirty-two were Smirke's, seven Stothard's, and one Charles Ryley's. Although this, the first collection of original Shakespeare illustrations, seems to have made no great splash at the moment, Delacroix was later to use it as his source, first for
his Macbeth lithograph of 1825 and later for his series of Hamlet lithographs in the 1830s and 1840s.\textsuperscript{19}

It may be that the Picturesque Beauties also figured in the conversation at a dinner party held at his Hampstead home in November 1786 by Josiah Boydell, who was associated in the printselling trade with his uncle, Alderman John Boydell.\textsuperscript{20} The older man, who was shortly to become lord mayor of London, had for many years supplied all of Europe with prints from his "warehouse" in Cheapside. In the course of the evening—George Romney, Benjamin West, and the watercolorist Paul Sandby were among the guests—somebody\textsuperscript{*} remarked, according to Josiah, that "the French had presented the works of their distinguished authors to the world in a much more respectable manner than the English had done. Shakespeare was mentioned, and several present said they would give 100 guineas for a fine Edition of Shakespeare. Being wound up by the conversation Alderman Boydell expressed a desire to undertake it, which was warmly encouraged." Within a week, the Boydells, inspired by patriotism as well as the scent of handsome publicity and profit, announced that they proposed to "help Britain acquire what she notoriously lacked, a school of Historical painting," appropriately devoted to scenes from the playwright who had by this time, by common consent, acquired the title of the national poet. Their plan was to commission from the day's leading artists a long series of oil paintings of Shakespearean subjects. These would be exhibited in a handsome purpose-built gallery, which was to be bequeathed, along with its contents, to the nation—the latter a promise that circumstances ultimately prevented being carried out. From these paintings, Boydell would have two sets of engravings made, the large ones to be gathered in an imperial folio album without text and the small ones incorporated in a sumptuous edition of the text as established by George Steevens. (In response to subscribers' complaints that if they took both series they did not want duplicates of the same subject, this policy was altered in 1794, when Boydell commissioned a separate series of designs for the small engravings.)

In June 1789, the newly erected Shakespeare Gallery was opened at 52 Pall Mall with the first batch of thirty-four paintings on the walls. More were added each spring, the total eventually reaching 167 canvases, by thirty-three artists. The promised books appeared simultaneously between 1791 and 1805. By the latter year, however, the loss of Boydell's lucrative European market for his stock of prints and the domestic dislocations caused by the Napoleonic Wars, combined with the fact that he had unwisely tied up a reported £100,000 of capital in the gallery, brought him to the verge of bankruptcy. He got Parliament's permission to hold a lottery, an occasional device used by failing exhibitors to try to recoup their losses. The winner of the grand prize received the whole inventory of paintings, which he auctioned off soon afterward for the derisory sum of £6,182.

From the beginning, Boydell's patriotic undertaking had a mixed reception. Before the gallery opened, it was publicized (1787–88) by a pair of pamphlets collectively entitled Imperfect Hints Towards a New Edition of Shakespeare, whose unidentified author ventured to suggest promising subjects that Boydell's stable of artists could find in a dozen plays, ranging from Titus Andronicus to A Midsummer Night's Dream.\textsuperscript{21} Two years after the gallery opened (1791), the poet and dramatist Edward Jerningham pub-

\textsuperscript{*}The Reverend John Romney emphatically claimed the honor for his father. "The idea of it," he wrote, "originated from himself individually; he had often ruminated upon it in his solitary hours; for he had always regarded Shakspeare as an author abounding in those picturesque conceptions and representations which may be so easily transferred to the canvass by an imaginative painter. But at a dinner given by Mr. Josiah Boydell . . . , when Shakspeare became the topic of conversation (induced probably by the circumstances of Mr. Romney's being at that time engaged in painting The Tempest . . . ), he with his usual ardour and enthusiasm, then gave utterance to his conceptions, and suggested the plan of a National Gallery of pictures from that great dramatist, which would be both honourable to the country, and to the poet, and contribute essentially to the advancement of historical painting. The idea being in unison with the feelings of the company, was received with rapture" (A. B. Chamberlain, George Romney [London, 1910], pp. 140–41). But Romney's patron Hayley (who modeled the figure of Caliban in the Tempest painting) differed from John Romney, asserting that the idea was first mooted by the Alderman himself during a conversation in the artist's house in Cavendish Square at which Hayley was present (William Hayley, The Life of George Romney, Esq. [Chichester, 1809], p. 106). Other candidates for the honor of originating the scheme were advanced by early writers: Fuseli, Benjamin West, and the bookseller-publisher John Nichols. For a hitherto unnoted claimant, see Appendix A.
lished a 24-page pamphlet in which, after disposing of the usual art-

exhibition fare—"mawkish Portraiture," the "gewgaws" of miniature's "fairy school," and suchlike trivialities—he turned to

Scenes of higher aim,
Where Eagle-Genius soars to nobler game;
Where Fancy, Reason, Taste, in one conjoin'd,
Unfold the workings of th' impassion'd mind.
Now to the laurell'd, academic band,
To ev'ry artist's emulative hand,
Munificence upholds her sacred prize,
And bids the daring reach it from the skies.22

After which, in equally abominable verse, he set forth his own list of desirable subjects. The press also hailed the gallery as a monument to England's cultural progress and improving public taste, the product of enlightened commercial enterprise:

Among the circumstances which will distinguish the present reign [said a newspaper], the most striking is the rapid improvement of the arts and sciences.—Poetry first emerged from obscurity; History followed, but at a tedious interval; and Painting, which embodies and personifies the other two, stood dubious whether to advance or retire, till a Macklin and a Boydell beckoned her from the shade. To noble patronage Painting owes little, to royal patronage, less.—The spirit of the People, as it accomplished a revolution in Government, so also in Taste.23

How much, if anything, Boydell had to do with these early bursts of approbation is impossible to tell; they may have been paid puffery in the manner of the time, or they may not. But, in private at least, other opinions were freely expressed. Within a week or two of the first announcement of the scheme, Horace Walpole wrote to the Countess of Upper Ossory (15 December 1786):

For the new edition of Shakespeare, it did not at all captivate me. In the first place I did not subscribe for my heirs and executors, as it would have been, when the term of completion is twelve years hence*—but I am not favourable to sets of prints for authors: I scarce know above one well executed, Coyell's Don Quixote—but mercy on us! Our painters to design for Shakespear! His commentators have not been more inadequate. Pray, who is to give an idea of Falstaffe, now Quin is dead?—and then Bartolozzi [one of Boydell's engravers], who is only fit to engrave for the Pastor fido, will be to give a pretty enamelled fan-mount of Macbeth! Salvator Rosa might, and Piranesi might dash out Duncan's Castle—but Lord help Alderman Boydell and the Royal Academy!24

Of the painters Boydell commissioned, the greatest catch was Reynolds, then nearing the end of his career and suffering from failing eyesight. The artist wrote to the Duke of Rutland early in 1787:

But the greatest news relating to virtu is Alderman Boydell's scheme of having pictures and prints taken from those pictures of the most interesting scenes of Shakespear, by which all the painters and engravers find engagements for eight or ten years; he wishes me to do eight pictures, but I have engaged only for one. He has insisted on my taking earnest money, and to my great surprise left upon my table five hundred pounds—to have more as I shall demand.25

Finding this a "mode of reasoning . . . not to be resisted," as Northcote put it, Reynolds painted three pictures for Boydell: the death of Cardinal Beaufort (2 Henry VI), for which he received, over and above the "earnest money," 500 guineas; Macbeth, Hecate, and the Witches (1,000 guineas);
and Robin Goodfellow (Puck), for which Northcote cites no price. Only two of the other Boydell artists who figure prominently in the history of British art contributed more than three pictures: Fuseli (three subjects from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and one each from *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *The Tempest*, *Henry IV*, *Henry V*, and *King Lear*), and Opie (two each from *Henry VI* and *King John*), one each from *Romeo and Juliet*, *Timon of Athens*, and *The Winter's Tale*). The others included Barry (*King Lear*), Benjamin West (*King Lear* and *Hamlet*), Joseph Wright of Derby (*The Tempest*, *The Winter's Tale*), Angelica Kauffmann (*Troilus and Cressida* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*), John Hoppner (*Cymbeline*), and Romney (two allegorical subjects and one subject each from *The Tempest* and *Troilus and Cressida*). The most prolific contributors were Francis Wheatley and the book illustrators Westall, Smirke, and Hamilton, who were represented by a total of ninety canvases.

One of the most curious features of the gallery was the distribution of subjects. No play was allotted a specific number of paintings, for it was thought, reasonably enough, that some plays "exhibit more interesting subjects than others." The subjects each artist would treat were evidently a matter for negotiation between him and Boydell. Certainly there was no correlation between the number of scenes drawn from a given play and the popularity of that play as measured by the number of performances it had had since the middle of the century. The three parts of *Henry VI*, none of which had been seen on the London stage since early in the century, were represented by fifteen pictures. The single play most painted for the gallery, *Henry VIII* (eight pictures), ranked fifteenth in the number of performances, 1751–1800. The plays tied for next place (seven paintings each), *As You Like It*, *Othello*, *The Tempest*, the first part of *Henry IV*, and *The Winter's Tale*, ranked eighth, ninth, eleventh, twelfth, and seventeenth, respectively. All the remaining plays were represented by from three to six paintings each; in their incidence, there was no differentiation between *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Richard III*, *Macbeth*, and *The Merchant of Venice*, which were the five most performed plays in that period, and *Julius Caesar*, *Timon of Athens*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*, which were the least often performed.

Whatever else these paintings were, they were not examples of theatrical art. Little attempt was made to suggest staging, and in the case of a number of the plays, the scenes selected were not included in the "adaptations" then being performed (see Introduction to Part Two, below). Insofar as the paintings reflected current theatrical style at all, they preserved the formal classicism of the then dominant Kemble-Siddons school of acting.

Boydell's Shakespeare, then, was emphatically a book, not a theater, Shakespeare. As befitted the dignity of historical painting, the subjects were taken from the printed page—Shakespeare's nominally, but, in the case of the history plays, with some infusion from the standard histories of Britain. And the pictures' graphic rhetoric, of which there was plenty, was derived from the printed text through the eyes of men influenced by, and anxious to emulate, either the Old Masters or the more recent masters of the rococo. Some Boydell paintings, indeed, like much contemporary book illustration, showed the lengths to which the rococo style could be inappropriately stretched. The spirit of Fragonard and Watteau is not easily reconciled with Shakespeare's.
As a whole, the gallery represented an eclectic range of currently fashionable styles. Boydell cared nothing for consistency or appropriateness; he was bent on making the gallery a showcase for every mode—the grand style, sentimental genre and pastoral, fancy pictures, and for a welcome dash of strangeness, nine of Henry Fuseli's characteristic designs, filled with neurotic intensity and preoccupied with the supernatural, the irrational, and the macabre: especially the six from King Lear, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Macbeth, and The Tempest. ("Fuseli," his patron the banker Thomas Coutts told Joseph Farington, "had Shakespeare's work so completely in His memory as to be able to recollect any passage alluded to—but with all His talent He still had a sort of distortion in His mind, something similar to what is seen more or less in all His pictures.")

The engraver John Landseer, father of Edwin, wrote to Sir Walter Scott in 1828: "As far as my experience has gone, I have found those mercenary publishing gentry 'most ignorant of what they're most assured,' namely, the Science of adapting Fine Art to Literature. . . . If you look into Boydell's Shakspear, you find, beside much other wretched management, no coherence or consistency of parts. Every scene is performed by a fresh set of players. You have as many Hamlets and Macbeths as painters."

The Boydell pictures fell far short of the ambition their visionary entrepreneur entertained for them—so much is clear. But the predominant reason for their failure was unrelated to whatever artistic merit they may or may not have possessed. Most of those who judged them were concerned by what they did with, or to, Shakespeare as the supreme English poet-dramatist. Walpole expressed in a private letter (to Lord Hailes, 21 September 1790) the widely held conviction that Shakespeare's genius transcended even that of the greatest Old Masters: "The Shakespeare Gallery is truly most inadequate to its prototypes—but how should it be worthy of them? could we recall the brightest luminaries of painting, could they do justice to Shakespeare? was Raphael himself as great a genius in his art as the author of Macbeth? and who could draw Falstaffe, but the writer of Falstaffe?"

This, however, was unfair to Boydell, who in his original preface to the catalogue of the Shakespeare Gallery, dated 1 May 1789, had warned that his elaborate scheme had its built-in limitation:

> Though I believe it will be readily admitted, that no subjects seem so proper to form an English School of Historical Painting, as the Scenes of the immortal Shakespeare; yet it must always be remembered, that he possessed powers which no pencil can reach; for such was the force of his creative imagination, that though he frequently goes beyond nature, he still continues to be natural, and seems only to do that, which nature would have done, had she o'erstepp'd her usual limits.—It must not then be expected, that the art of the Painter can ever equal the sublimity of our Poet. The strength of Michael Angelo, united to the grace of Raphael, would have laboured in vain.—For what pencil can give to his airy beings "a local habitation and a name"? It is therefore hoped, that the spectator will view these Pictures with this regard, and not allow his imagination, warmed by the magic powers of the Poet, to expect from Painting, what Painting cannot perform.

Obviously, none of the artists who accepted Boydell's commissions were deterred by the proclaimed impossibility of their task. Shakespeare could, in fact, be painted; the trouble lay in the choice of subject. "It was a subject of complaint," recalled Northcote, who contributed eight scenes from the
history plays and a single one from *Romeo and Juliet*, "that we painters didn't choose the finest passages to paint from. It was a mistaken complaint, for pithy sayings are addressed to the ear, not to the eye, and they are not suitable for painting. These fine passages are proper for Shakespeare's language, but they are not fit subjects for the painter's language, which is addressed to a different organ." The debate over this point, fed by hundreds of paintings from Shakespeare, would drag its weary length across the next half-century and beyond.

Northcote again: "With the exception of a few pictures by Sir Joshua and Opie, and—I hope I may add—myself, it was such a collection of slip-slop imbecility as was dreadful to look at." This was possibly too severe a judgment, but it was unquestionably true that Boydell's public-spirited project never stirred much enthusiasm among art lovers. The valuation they placed on "those daubs of pictures," as Hazlitt called them, was apparent enough in the prices they brought at auction, an average of no more than £20 each for the ninety canvases by Smirke, Hamilton, Westall, and Wheatley. Fuseli's went for next to nothing. A few, to be sure, were unapologetically hung in private collections. Lord Egremont acquired Reynolds's *Cardinal Beaufort* for 500 guineas, and Sir Francis Baring, the banker, furnished a room in his Hampshire house, recently altered by George Dance at a cost of £25,000, with six Boydell paintings, two each by Opie, Northcote, and Peters.

The engravings had a wider impact. Increasingly worn, they were reproduced, separately and in a number of editions of Shakespeare, for many years to come. Not all lovers of the plays welcomed them. Charles Lamb's diatribe is famous:

> What injury (short of the theatres) did not Boydell's "Shakespeare Gallery" do me with Shakespeare! To have Opie's Shakespeare, Northcote's Shakespeare, light-headed Fuseli's Shakespeare, heavy-headed Romney's Shakespeare, wooden-headed West's Shakespeare (though he did the best in "Lear"), deaf-headed Reynolds's Shakespeare, instead of my, and everybody's Shakespeare. To be tied down to an authentic face of Juliet! To have Imogen's portrait! To confine the illimitable!

In another place, Lamb remarked that he preferred to read Shakespeare in Tonson's edition rather than in Boydell's because in the former the plates, though "execrably bad," did not pretend to represent a scene actually found in Shakespeare's text, whereas Boydell's did—and thus destroyed his precious imaginary conception. Thackeray had grim recollections of an impressionable childhood exposed to Boydell prints. "There was," he wrote,

> Boydell's Shakespeare, black and ghastly gallery of murky Opies, glum Northcotes, straddling Fuselis! there were Lear, Oberon, Hamlet, with starting muscles, rolling eyeballs, and long pointed quivering fingers; there was little Prince Arthur (Northcote) crying, in white satin, and bidding good Hubert not put out his eyes; there was Hubert crying; there was little Rutland being run through the poor little body by bloody Clifford; there was Cardinal Beaufort (Reynolds) gnashing his teeth, and grinning and howling demoniacally on his deathbed (a picture frightful to the present day); there was Lady Hamilton (Romney)* waving a torch and dancing before a black background—a melancholy museum indeed. Smirke's delightful Seven Ages only fitfully relieved its general gloom.

Some twenty years later (1876), when the engravings were once more reproduced, a writer in the *Quarterly Review* was more judicious:

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*This was the picture of Cassandra Raving, from *Troilus and Cressida*, one of the many Romney paintings for which Lady Hamilton posed. For whatever it may be worth—her early life is swathed in mystery, some of it scandalous—one might note that she is said to have had a distant personal connection with Boydell, having entered the service of his brother-in-law at the age of thirteen as a nursery maid (Chamberlain, *George Romney*, p. 103).
It is . . . true . . . to say that from such a company nothing but artistic mediocrity was to be expected. . . . On examining the illustrations carefully, we are conscious of a feeling of disappointment. The volume [of engravings], on the whole, is a record of lost opportunities. Still it is interesting and valuable as a representation of the state of art in England at the time, and in one or two instances, where the painter broke away from the conventional shackles of an artificial age, we have satisfactory results.40

The influence the Boydell pictures had on later painters of Shakespearean subjects is not documented; almost the only evidence we have is an incidental remark by W. B. Scott: "Even to the youngest of us [aspiring artists] the ignorance of costume and other historical properties was apparent, and even dramatically the action and expression of the actors were manifestly untrue."41 The original bound "galleries" were too costly for many artists, established or aspiring, to buy, although John Crome ("Old Crome"), the founder of the Norwich school of landscapists, is said to have possessed both sets.42 But the later, cheaper editions reached a wider audience, and there can be no question that most artists who grew up in the first half of the nineteenth century, at least, were acquainted with the Boydell engravings, the memory of which must have subliminally affected, in one way or another, their approach to Shakespeare.*

The engraved gallery had a mixed influence on the Shakespearean subjects that would be most painted in the next century; some Boydell scenes would be represented over and over in subsequent Shakespearean art, but among the other popular subjects there were at least as many that Boydell's contributors did not paint. Among the former were Much Ado About Nothing 3.1 (Beatrice eavesdrops on Hero and Ursula); Romeo and Juliet 3.5 (the lovers' farewell), 5.3 (the tomb scene), and the several scenes with Juliet and the Nurse; Merry Wives of Windsor 1.1 (Slender and Anne Page and Mr. Page's offstage dinner); A Midsummer Night's Dream 2.1, 2; 4.1 (the fairy scenes); and Merchant of Venice 2.5 (Shylock leaves Jessica in charge), 3.2 (the casket scene), and 5.1 (the Lorenzo-Jessica love scene). Other subjects in the gallery, for example Twelfth Night 4.3 (the brief exchange of Sebastian and Olivia) and 5.1 (the long dénouement scene), and many of the scenes in the history plays, would seldom if ever be depicted again.

Most striking of all is the absence from the gallery of a number of scenes that were destined to become staples of the artist's repertoire: Merchant of Venice 4.1 (the trial scene); Romeo and Juliet 2.2 (the balcony scene) and 4.1 (Friar Laurence gives Juliet the potion); Macbeth 2.2 (the dagger scene outside Duncan's chamber); and Cymbeline 4.2 (Imogen in the cave). The popularity of some of these scenes, neglected by Boydell, was doubtless due in part to their fame on the nineteenth-century stage, when the breach between performance and artistic presentation, at its widest in the Boydell Gallery, was narrowed.

Not all the trends in Shakespearean art in the following decades could, of course, be associated with Boydell. Easel artists also had at their disposal numerous engravings from other sources, including the editions illustrated by Smirke, Stothard, Singleton, and others, to suggest subjects and compositions. It has been reported that an incomplete count of the designs of Shakespearean scenes found in editions of the plays or collections of prints published between 1780 and 1810 totals almost 650, not including the 167 Boydell prints and those published separately.43† One

*The iconographical evidence bearing on the point has yet to be studied, so far as I know. Another worthwhile exercise in research might be devoted to determining how far, if at all, the Boydell paintings with their groupings, rhetorical poses, and settings affected the evolving manner of Shakespearean stage mounting and performance in the early nineteenth century.

†In 1835, an enthusiast in Gloucestershire named Thomas Turner began to interleave his copy of the 1802 Boydell edition with engravings. The resulting 44-volume set, now at the Huntington Library, contains 3,000 prints. Although many of them represent actors, scenery, and historical personages in the plays, the remainder are said to constitute "a virtually complete run of the engraved book illustrations down to about 1820" (Robert R. Wark, Drawings from the Turner Shakespeare [San Marino, Cal., 1973], p. 7).
31. Francis Wheatley, Scene from “The Two Gentlemen of Verona” (5. 4) (Woodmason’s New Shakespeare Gallery) (Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection). Valentine intervenes as Proteus threatens Silvia: “I’ll force thee yield to my desire.” Proteus will immediately apologize, and Julia, in breeches, will swoon.

source was a direct imitation of the Boydell Gallery, undertaken while the enterprise in Pall Mall was in its first bloom of fame. In 1792, a “Society of Gentlemen” announced the establishment in Dublin of the Irish Shakespeare Gallery. The only publicly mentioned member of the “society” was James Woodmason, a London stationer who had moved to Ireland sometime in the early 1780s, after his premises were destroyed by a fire in which seven of his children perished. The project’s inspiration was obvious enough: it was to be an edition of Shakespeare that would include seventy-two engravings made from original paintings, two for each play. The gallery opened in May 1793 with eighteen pictures, but shortly after five more were added, it closed. Woodmason, evidently blessed with more optimism than prudence, then moved the collection to London, where he installed it in rooms belonging to the Polygraphic Society in old Schomburg House, almost directly opposite the Boydell Gallery, and opened for business in January 1794 with four additional paintings. So brazen an attempt to compete was foredoomed, particularly in view of Boydell’s commanding position in the trade; the New Shakespeare Gallery, after suffering various vicissitudes, closed in the spring of 1795. Eleven of the
promised plates were issued and six more were left unfinished (the edition itself never materialized). Twenty-two years later, in 1817, Woodmason's son issued all seventeen as *A Series of Engravings to Illustrate the Works of Shakespeare*. The paintings were, with a single exception, the work of artists who had already contributed to the prototype gallery or were in the process of doing so: Peters (six subjects), Fuseli and Opie (five each), Hamilton (four), and Northcote and Wheatley (three each). The selection of subjects did not slavishly follow that in the Boydell Gallery: only about ten of Woodmason's were to be seen across the road as well, and only one artist (Fuseli, with *Macbeth and the Witches*) painted the same subject for both galleries.

Another exercise in commissioning and engraving pictures illustrating English literary subjects was that of Thomas Macklin, a printer and publisher in Fleet Street. In 1787, some months after Boydell had announced his plan, Macklin issued a prospectus in which he proposed to commission one hundred paintings, to be hung in a permanent exhibition

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32. Thomas Gainsborough, *Young Hobbinol and Gandaretta* (Macklin's Poet's Gallery) (Huntington Library and Art Gallery). The only (tenuous) connection this rural idyll has with the poem it purportedly illustrated, William Somerville's *Hobbino, or the Rural Games, A Burlesque Poem, in Blank Verse* (1740) is the fleeting mention, early on, of Hobbinol and Gandaretta—the king and queen of the May in the poem—playing together as children.
and engraved and sold in groups of four (but not included in an edition, as Boydell’s were). Since he did not erect a special building, as Boydell did, Macklin was able to open his gallery a year earlier, in 1788. Only twenty-four of the projected hundred paintings were included in the series of engravings, and several others were issued separately. The poets illustrated in the series itself were Shakespeare, Collins, Gray, Pope, Shenstone, Thomson, Somerville, Spenser, Chaucer, Mrs. Barbauld, Gay, Jerningham, Mallet, Prior, and Goldsmith. An “Ode to Meditation,” by a writer of almost desperate obscurity, Dr. George Gregory, was represented by Reynolds’s Tuccia, the Vestal Virgin, engraved outside the series. The selection of subjects faithfully conformed to the range of poets represented in the annual exhibitions, and so did the selection of artists, all but a handful of whom—not including Gainsborough—also labored for Boydell.

Macklin’s gallery, though its scale was reduced, seems to have been moderately successful; at least it did not ruin its owner, as Boydell’s eventually did. But the next such project, and as it proved the last, was not so fortunate. It came at a time when the Boydell Gallery had already creamed off the market, and to follow a Shakespeare Gallery with a Gallery of the Miltonic Sublime (its official title), even if it contained less than one-third of the number of paintings Boydell commissioned, required more confidence than the state of the fine book and art trade, depressed by the wars, justified.

Henry Fuseli, the projector, was not among Britain’s most fashionable artists, active and prominent though he had been in London for two decades. Along with Hogarth and Blake, who engraved several of his designs, Fuseli well symbolized the increasingly closer association of painting and literature that we have traced in chapter 1. He produced more pictures from English literature in several media—oil, watercolor, pencil, sepia, ink-and-wash—than did any other important artist of his time. But whereas Hogarth was the prototypical beef-and-beer Englishman and Blake also was a Londoner born and bred, however odd, the Swiss-born Fuseli was an alien. Despite his long residence in England and his close connection with the Royal Academy, he remained, culturally, temperamentally, and artistically, an outsider. His was the first English oeuvre, and as it proved the only considerable one, to be produced by the free exercise of a feverish imagination on the literary text.

A product of the Sturm und Drang movement in Switzerland and a disciple of Johann Jakob Bodmer, whose mission in life was to revivify German literature by setting before it the example of English poetry, as a young man Fuseli steeped himself in Milton, Pope, Gray, Thomson, Young, and above all Shakespeare. His first ambition had been to be a poet, and he actually translated some of Shakespeare into German. But he discovered that his dominant talent was for painting—specifically, painting that had its inspirational origin in sublime or dramatic poetry. While he nurtured this ambition, he made a living by accepting commissions to illustrate books. In 1769, for example, he designed frontispieces for the fourth edition of Smollett’s Peregrine Pickle. (His own favorite among contemporary novelists, however, seems to have been Sterne, whom he never illustrated. Farington wrote that he “spoke with raptures of Sterne’s Sentimental Journey, saying He preferred a page of it to the whole Spectator [or] Rambler,” considering it a “spontaneous, true effu-
sion” in opposition to John Hoppner’s opinion that it was “the effect of labour.”)  

During a long stay in Rome (1770–78), Fuseli was overpowered by the Sistine Chapel ceiling, which suggested to him the scale and magnificence with which a national monument to Shakespeare might be erected—a grandiose project in the spirit of the Shakespeare Jubilee of 1769 that his friend Garrick had produced at Stratford as a lavish exercise in Bardolatry. “He saw in imagination,” wrote one of his early biographers,

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Nothing came of this vision of a Michelangelesque Pantheon dedicated exclusively to Shakespeare, but John Boydell, whose own vision was supported, as Fuseli’s was not, by many years of business experience and large amounts of capital, accomplished the same end more prosaically in the Shakespeare Gallery. The nearest Fuseli himself came to realizing the dream he had in the Sistine Chapel was a celebration not of Shakespeare but of Milton, his second literary deity. In 1790, when he was finishing his paintings for Boydell, he was engaged by the publisher Joseph Johnson to provide thirty designs for an edition of Milton to be annotated by William Cowper, who would also translate the Latin and Italian poems: “a Milton that is to rival, and, if possible, to exceed in splendor Boydell’s Shakespeare,” Cowper wrote to a friend. The venture was attractive to Fuseli, who counted Cowper as his favorite contemporary poet and had recently gone through the manuscript of his translation of Homer with a friendly but critical eye. Cowper, however, went into one of his periods of mental breakdown and, as a further deterrent, Boydell announced his own forthcoming (but never realized) edition of Milton; so Johnson dropped his plan. Fuseli then committed himself to a project he had thought of the year before, “a series of Pictures for Exhibition, Such as Boydells and Macklins.”"Satan, Sin and Death,” he wrote to his patron, the Liverpool banker-scholar William Roscoe, alluding to a Miltonic subject hitherto most notably treated by Hogarth, “would not suffer me to think of anything mortal or immortal till I had flung them into picturesque Existence on a Miniature-Canvas thirteen feet by ten.”

This was in 1791, when Fuseli was in the process of more than doubling his original goal of twenty pictures. As the years passed, his mood alternated between despair and exhilaration. Early in 1793, he told Roscoe that “Milton is Likely to eat me up before I Shall be able to dine once with him.” But the next year he wrote that the scheme would “make me . . . The plan . . . exceeds in magnificence and I hope in execution, as far as it is gone . . . most Schemes that went before me.” “Unlimited applause and fresh green hopes of Success are indeed poured out before my pictures, by all who See them,” he reported to Roscoe in 1795, adding, “even Americans seem to be Struck by them.” The next year he passed the halfway mark, with twenty-three canvases finished.

His megalomania grew apace. By this time, he was referring to the
Milton Gallery as “a monument of myself” (hence his refusal of offers from Lawrence and Opie to contribute pictures) and declaring that even Michelangelo, “great as he was would in my situation perhaps not have dared to undertake” the colossal task. His hope that he could complete the whole collection by March or April 1797—“the largest room in London will not perhaps be capacious enough to hold what I have finished advanced or begun”—was, not surprisingly, unfulfilled. The Gallery of the Miltonic Sublime finally opened in May 1799, in the Royal Academy’s former rooms in Pall Mall. Forty-seven paintings were on display, some of them, in the true spirit of history painting, as wide as the canvas he had described to Roscoe eight years before, and two feet taller. The first month’s receipts were only £117, and they dwindled thereafter. Despite his net loss that season, Fuseli reopened the gallery the next year, but with no better luck. “All who go, praise,” he complained to Roscoe, “but Milton can not stand the competition of Seringapatam [a panorama then drawing crowds] and the posies of Portraits and Knickknacks of Sommerset-house [the Royal Academy’s new home]—my exhibition must be broke up, and the Question now remains what am I to do?”

After four months, the show closed for good. “The greater part of my exhibition,” Fuseli told another friend, “the rejected Family of a silly Father, are now again rolled up, Or packed together against the Walls of my Study to be Seasoned for dust, the worm, and oblivion.”

Short of a lottery, which evidently could not be arranged to rescue Fuseli as it was a few years later in behalf of Boydell’s failed fortune, how could his “Enormous Miltonic Lumberstock,” as he called it, be profitably liquidated? “I have often imagined that it might be possible to bring about a Milton-Society who might unite to do something for me, in order to perpetuate His Ideas: but at present my Mind is so occupied with academic Nonsense”—he had entered upon his duties as professor of painting the year before—“that I can neither form nor properly digest a Scheme of that kind.” Roscoe solved the problem to the extent of taking eleven...
Fuseli did manage to sell a few others. Thomas Coutts bought *The Vision of the Lazar House*, which he left to his daughter the Countess of Guilford, at whose home Fuseli was to die. Lord Rivers took *Satan Calling His Legions*, which later went to the Duke of Wellington, and Sir Thomas Lawrence bought three more. But in 1801, when the young American artist Washington Allston, who had seen and admired engravings of several of the pictures back home in Charleston, South Carolina, visited the studio, most of the paintings were still there, hanging on the walls or cluttering the floor. Allston singled one out as having "made a great impression on him." "No, you don't like that," the momentarily humbled Fuseli exclaimed. "You can't like that; it's bad; it's damned bad!"

Fuseli would undoubtedly have revived his former high estimate of his Miltonic oeuvre if the gallery had been a commercial success. Some of his fellow artists thought better of his work than he did. "O Society for Encouragement of Art!" exclaimed Blake. "O King & Nobility of England! Where have you hid Fuseli's Milton? Is Satan troubled at his Exposure?" Later, Benjamin Robert Haydon, a fellow megalomaniac and aspirant to the grand style, would write in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "Fuseli [sic] was undoubtedly the greatest genius of that day. His Milton Gallery showed a range of imagination equal to the poet's."

After the Milton Gallery closed, Fuseli continued to illustrate books—editions of Cowper, Gray, Thomson, *Paradise Lost* once again, and two of Shakespeare. Living until 1825, he was the last survivor of the major eighteenth-century painters of literary subjects, a conspicuous but unappreciated original in an era when convention, tameness, and sentimentality dominated the portrayal of themes from English poetry. His devotion to Milton never wavered. At dinner at his fellow academician Farington's home, years after the Gallery of the Miltonic Sublime had ended in fiasco, "Fuseli," as his host wrote, "spoke with tears in His eyes of a passage in Milton as excelling in beauty, & sublimity, and feeling; all that He had read."