From the end of the eighteenth century, which was ushered out by the Milton Gallery, to the beginning of Victoria's reign in 1837, with few exceptions (though, since they included Turner and Constable, and the subject painters Wilkie and Martin, they were important ones), British art went through a period of lethargy. The whole basis of thinking about art gradually changed. The campaign to establish a school of history painting had suffered twin setbacks with the failure of Boydell's and Fuseli's bold attempts. The inherited aesthetic doctrine that had governed judgment in artistic matters lost its authority, and no comparable body of theory emerged to take its place. Criticism, largely in the hands of the reviewers of the annual exhibitions, tended to be ad hoc and pragmatic rather than theoretical, though among the critics was the dominating figure of William Hazlitt, a trained painter who had exhibited miniature portraits at the Royal Academy in 1802 and 1805 and made (unexhibited) ones of Wordsworth and Coleridge in 1803. With the advent of a large and influential bourgeois audience for painting, to be described in the next chapter, the emphasis in everyday art discussion shifted from the aesthetic to the social and moral: new buyers, new ideals.

Nothing better illustrates this change in the cultural orientation of art than the fortunes of the *ut pictura poesis* concept. After the appearance of Lessing's *Laocön*, with its crucial distinction between the spatial and temporal arts, Reynolds, formerly a true believer, recanted somewhat, in his thirteenth discourse. Another painter in the neoclassic mode, James Barry, declared in one of his Royal Academy lectures, delivered 1794–98, that "painting is not, as has been said, a silent poem, and poetry a speaking picture; but, much more truly, that painting is poetry realised, and that full, complete, and perfect poetry is indeed nothing more than an ani-
mated account or relation of the mere conception of a picture." Fuseli, writing in the Analytical Review in those same years, reversed his anti-Lessing position and lamented that "from long bigotted deference to the old maxim that poetry is painting in speech, and painting dumb poetry, the two sisters, marked with features so different by nature, and the great masters of composition, her oracles, have been constantly confounded with each other by the herds of mediocrity and thoughtless imitation." John Opie, still another professor of painting at the Royal Academy, told his students in 1807 that "the most striking beauties, as presented to one sense, being frequently wholly untranslateable into the language of another, it necessarily results, that many interesting passages in history and poetry are incapable of affording more than a bald and insipid representation on canvas."

These various affirmations that the parallel between poetry and painting was less marked and mutually productive than the adherents of ut pictura poesis for a century had believed were echoed by Romantic literary critics who strengthened the growing anti-pictorialist tradition in poetry. "What are deemed fine descriptions," wrote Coleridge, "produce their effects almost purely by a charm of words, with which & with whose combinations, we associate feelings indeed, but no distinct Images." Like Barry in his own time and Ruskin half a century later, Coleridge subsumed both of the sister arts under the single encompassing ideal of Poetry, which was now defined not as expression specifically in language but as expression regardless of the medium employed. There were, it is true, some diehard believers in the old notion of poetic pictorialism. Leigh Hunt, for one, declared, "To say . . . that the poet does not include the painter in his more visible creations, is to deprive him of half his privileges, nay, of half his very poems." But it was in the new, Coleridgean form that the Horatian tenet persisted, although it ceased to be the subject of much profitable debate.

The concept of the mutual attraction of the two arts, however, was too deep-seated and convenient to be cast aside, and if it languished as an aesthetic principle, it flourished on a more demotic level as a statement of a demonstrable fact, the joining of painting and the written word in practice. The conjunction that led to the invocation of the "sisterhood" as an ever handy cliché took several forms, the most notable of which, in terms of popular culture, was the increasing popularity—for it was nothing new—of the illustrated book in the publishing trade at large. For our purposes, the physical conjunction was most evident at every annual exhibition of art, where the subjects of poetry and other kinds of literature were placed within the frames of paintings. The literary painting was in fact the culmination, in English middle-class culture, of ut pictura poesis, though in a form that no eighteenth-century theorist could have anticipated.

During this transition period, most of the excitement at the annual exhibitions, aside from short-lived bursts of interest in one now-forgotten painter or another, centered on such artists as Turner and Constable the landscapists, Lawrence the portraitist, Wilkie the Scottish genre painter, and Martin the wide-canvas master of cataclysm. Most of the eighteenth-century masters who had occasionally treated literary themes, such as Reynolds and Romney, had gone from the scene. Fuseli exhibited his last pictures at the Royal Academy in the year of his death, 1825. Benjamin
West painted pictures from Pope, Gray, and Milton before his own death in 1820. Two lesser figures, Hamilton and Wheatley, had died in 1801.

Among the prolific minor artists who represented subjects from English literature in these years were a few whose names and some of whose pictures have survived because their specialties appealed to certain well-established breeds of collectors—George Clint, DeWilde’s successor as the graphic recorder of contemporary English drama; the animal painters James Ward, Richard Barrett Davis, and William Barraud. But most of those whose paintings from literature were seen at the exhibitions year after year are almost totally forgotten: the Corboulds (Richard, Henry, and George), the Chalons (Alfred Edward and John James), the Stephanoffs (James and Francis Philip), Henry Singleton, Alexander Carse, John Cawse, Henry Perronet Briggs, Stephen Francis Rigaud, Samuel Drummond, William Artaud, Henry Pierce Bone, John Boaden . . .

As far as literary painting was concerned, therefore, this was not a time of giants. Instead, its interest lies in the trends these industrious artists, most of them not far above the rank of hacks, represented. After 1800, there was a sharp decline in the incidence of pictures from currently talked-about novels and poems whose fame was to prove ephemeral. Between that year and 1815, only a dozen or so paintings from contemporary fiction are recorded, mostly illustrating Gothic romances like The Mysteries of Udolpho. But after 1825 and extending to mid-century, there was considerably greater interest in such novelists—popular then, today universally regarded as “minor”—as Captain Marryat, William Harrison Ainsworth, and (not only minor, but utterly missing from literary history) Mrs. Samuel Carter Hall. Meanwhile, the representation of currently popular but equally evanescent poetry, so marked a phenomenon in the period 1780–1800, dwindled into insignificance. Just as subjects from Scott came to dominate the treatment of fiction in art, so Scott (again), Byron, and Moore edged out the negligible versemakers of their day, to be succeeded eventually by Tennyson above all. (A small phenomenon of 1825–50 was the persistence of several eighteenth-century favorites, among them Blair, Akenside, and Collins.) The market for pictures from the small fry of contemporary literature, as we now see them to have been, simply vanished.

It is hard to tell just what was the prevailing attitude toward pictures from English literature during the first three decades of the century. Privately, a number of painters indulged the by now well established habit of literary reference. Possibly inspired by Thomas Girtin’s club mentioned in chapter 1—in the interim there had been another such group, brought together by John Sell Cotman, a member of the original club—in 1808 eight or ten artists formed the Society for the Study of Epic and Pastoral Design, informally known as the Bread and Cheese Society, who met every week to paint agreed-upon subjects from literature. They would continue to do so (with changing membership) until 1851, by which time their devotion to literary themes had long since spread to the public at large. Their subjects over the years, apart from non-English literature, included Tam o’ Shanter and the witches, the balcony scene from Romeo and Juliet, The Toilet (The Rape of the Lock), Robinson Crusoe, Rasselas, The Vicar of Wakefield, the Spectator, The Faerie Queene, Paradise Lost, Comus, “the sonnets and plays, not historical, of Shakespeare,” Scott’s novels and poems, The Castle of Otranto, the novels of G. P. R. James, and the poems of
Wordsworth, Byron, Rogers, and Moore—a fairly comprehensive sample of the subjects that proved to be most popular in the first half of the century.

But the failure of the Milton Gallery and of Fuseli's attempts to sell off most of the pictures, as well as the bargain-basement prices commanded by the Boydell Shakespeare paintings when they were auctioned in 1805, suggests that the art-loving public in these early years of the century was not wildly enthusiastic about literary pictures, at least of the varieties brought into being by Fuseli and Boydell. Whatever their intrinsic worth—many were inconveniently large, and probably just as many were of undesirable subjects—the attempted sale within five years of 47 paintings from Milton and 167 from Shakespeare must have glutted the market. Modern art auction houses would never contemplate so depressant a practice.

The nineteen-year-old Charles Robert Leslie, writing to his sister back in America in 1813, may have accurately sized up the demand when he reported that "pictures from modern poets (that is, all English ones, among others) do not take, and even if they should, it is uncertain how long they may continue in vogue. To insure a picture currency, therefore,

35. Henry Singleton, *Palemon and Lavinia* (undated) (Tate Gallery, London). From Thomson's *The Seasons* ("Autumn"); one of the few surviving, or identifiable, paintings by this prolific artist. Like Fuseli's *Milton as a Boy*, it merely adopts a literary reference to embellish a cliche subject, rustic lovers in a gleaning field.
it is necessary that it should tell either some scriptural or classic story. Even Shakespeare, Dante, and Milton, are scarcely sufficiently canonised to be firm ground.\textsuperscript{58} To be sure, Leslie, in that very year, exhibited at the Royal Academy a painting from \textit{Macbeth}, suggested by the lines “... now wither’d Murder / Alarum’d by his sentinel, the wolf”; and soon afterward, he laid the foundations of his prosperous career as a literary artist by producing scenes from \textit{The Merry Wives of Windsor}, as well as from Scott and the \textit{Spectator}. But these were narrative and dramatic subjects, suited both to his own talents and to the taste of the public, and meanwhile there remained some market resistance to the portrayal of more lyrical or “poetic” subjects. It was said much later that the florid pictures of William Hilton, a specialist in \textit{The Faerie Queene}, “met with very few purchasers.”\textsuperscript{9}

This may well have been true also of the work of Henry Howard, who specialized in Milton. The frequency with which pictures with suspiciously similar titles, by Hilton and Howard and others, appear in successive catalogues of the Royal Academy and the British Institution (founded in 1806 as an important alternative exhibition place) implies that they were not necessarily repetitions to oblige a demand but the same canvases, shuttled from one exhibition to another in an attempt to find buyers. A reviewer in 1834 remarked of Howard’s \textit{The Gardens of Hesperus} (from \textit{Comus}), which had remained unsold at both exhibitions that year, “if poetic subjects were not at a sad discount, it would soon find a purchaser.”\textsuperscript{19}

That so many subjects from the standard English poets continued to be painted, whether or not the art-buying public could absorb them all, was to some extent a reflection of the reprint publishing business, where new editions of these poets were continually being put together. Although Henry Singleton was not primarily a book illustrator, his lengthy production record, including most of the hundred literary paintings he exhibited between 1785 and 1839, was typical of that of most artists who worked for publishers: Shakespeare, Ossian, Sterne, Milton, Spenser, the \textit{Spectator}. But Singleton also could recognize straws in the wind when he saw them, and the most significant aspect of this list was the appearance, beginning in 1814, of subjects from Byron (the first was \textit{Conrad and Gulnare}, from \textit{The Corsair}), and from Scott, beginning in 1820 with \textit{Old Mortality}. The recorded oeuvres of two veterans of the book-illustration trade are equally symptomatic. In 1816 Stothard, then sixty-one, showed his first subject from Burns (\textit{Tam o’Shanter}) at the Royal Academy, and in 1828, his first from Scott. Westall made designs for Sharpe’s edition of Scott’s \textit{Marmion} in 1809; at the Academy exhibition of 1832, he exhibited \textit{Haidee Watching Don Juan as He Sleeps} and a scene from Scott’s \textit{The Wild Huntsman}.

Burns (posthumously), Scott, Byron, Moore: these became the new golden names in the world of illustrative art, restoring the faltering fortunes of literary painting on a broader, more popular basis. And as they were appearing with ever greater frequency in the exhibition catalogues, the names of new artists with arresting new specialties were beginning to appear as well. John Martin made his first splash at the Royal Academy in 1812 with \textit{Sadak in Search of the Waters of Oblivion} (pl. 36). Although he commanded most attention with his spectacular nightmarish visions of biblical subjects—Joshua, the fall of Babylon, and Belshazzar’s Feast—in the years before Victoria came to the throne he also exhibited several pictures from Milton, Goldsmith, Gray, and Byron. Between 1821 and
1835, William Etty, whose main interest in English poetry was the occasions it provided for painting the unclothed female, showed several subjects from *Comus* and *The Faerie Queene*. But neither Martin, haunted by fantastic visions of catastrophe in monstrous natural and architectural settings, nor Etty, haunted by the nude, influenced the course that the painting of literary subjects was to take during the rest of the century. Each, in his own way, was too specialized to appeal to the domestic tastes of the new, expanding art public. Instead, the future belonged to adaptable artists who had the good fortune to discover what the public most wanted.

The most momentous event of the time that determined the future of nineteenth-century literary painting was what might be called the fortunate fall of the history picture. We saw in chapter 1 that scenes from English history had become frequent subjects of art in the last third of the eighteenth century. Their popularity increased through the first decades of the nineteenth, peaking, as Roy Strong points out, in the 1840s, when as many as twenty such paintings were hung every year at the Royal Academy. Among these hundreds of pictures were many that could also be called literary paintings, because, as the entries in the catalogues show, their subjects were as closely identified with Shakespeare and Scott as with historiographers: Richard I, King John, Richard II, Henry V, the Princes in the Tower, Cardinal Wolsey, Mary Queen of Scots, Cromwell, Charles II.

By no means all pictures from English history painted in response to this developing taste conformed to Thackeray’s scornful description of history paintings as “pieces of canvas from twelve to thirty feet long, representing for the most part personages who never existed, . . . performing actions that never occurred, and dressed in costumes they never could have worn.” Such pictures—history paintings in the old sense of the term—continued to be produced, but the market for them, governed

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37. James Drummond, *The Porteous Mob* (Royal Scottish Academy 1855) (National Gallery of Scotland). A historical scene treated with dramatic chiaroscuro, the nighttime riot in Edinburgh that was touched off by the execution of a smuggler in 1735. Events in Scottish history were a staple source of nineteenth-century British art, and their appeal was enhanced by their frequent association with Scott’s novels, in this case *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*, which begins with the Porteous riot (chs. 4–7).
38. Solomon A. Hart, King Richard and Soldan Saladin (RA 1835) (Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool). The steady stream of medieval subjects in British art was fed from numerous sources, from Shakespeare's history plays in the late eighteenth century to Tennyson's Idylls of the King in the Victorian era. This painting is from Scott's The Talisman (chap. 9): Saladin, disguised as an Arabian physician, attends the ailing Richard Coeur de Lion.

39. John Gilbert, Cardinal Wolsey and the Duke of Buckingham (British Institution 1862) (Tate Gallery, London). An old, conventional subject of history painting kept alive into the mid-Victorian era: a meeting of the leaders of the court in Shakespeare's Henry VIII (1. I). This is a sketch for the picture now in the Royal Shakespeare Theatre Picture Gallery.

by space considerations if nothing else, had largely vanished except for local corporations (and, in the 1840s, Parliament: see chapter 8, below) desirous of animating the wall expanses of their new public buildings with inspiring themes.

While "heroic" history painting was in irreversible decline, alongside the big outdated canvases flourished smaller pictures belonging to the new category of "sentimental" or "domestic" history. It was here that historical subjects were truly popularized. The paramount reason for their rise in esteem among the art-loving public was the fact that, as early as the Shakespeare Gallery, painters increasingly chose, not the conventional stately element of English history, but the domestic life of historical
characters, their private joys and suffering— in short, the biographical side of history as imagined, in their respective ways, by Scott, Carlyle, and Macaulay. Like Thackeray, in the first paragraph of The History of Henry Esmond, people "would have History familiar rather than heroic." As history painting of the old kind moved toward almost total eclipse, a writer in Blackwood's Magazine (1850) could declare that "probably no subjects are more generally popular than those that may be styled the homely-historical; scenes in the private apartments of royalty; the personal adventures and perils of princes, whether in the palace or the prison—on the steps of the throne or the verge of the scaffold."  

* The emphasis was on "homely" rather than "historical," and "historical" itself in practice was to be interpreted broadly, because from portraying intimate events in the lives that were the stuff of history it was a short, easy, and irresistible step to portraying similar events in the lives of fictional characters, as the mixed oeuvres of such popular practitioners of "historical genre" as Sir John Gilbert, Mr. and Mrs. E. M. Ward, John Pettie, and William Frederick Yeames (pl. 41) amply show. This is what constituted the fortunate fall of history painting. With the great expansion of dramatis personae and incident, taken more and more from English literature, history painting (in both the specialized and the broad senses) was democratized; and the boundary between it and narrative genre, whose very essence was domesticity, became ever less distinct. As history painting in the old mode disappeared, genre, by a kind of contrary action, rose to the top of the hierarchy of nineteenth-century popular art.†

This was probably the most significant and far-reaching shift of direction in the whole history of nineteenth-century English taste in painting, involving many more artists and art-buyers, not to say sheer number of paintings, than the late Victorian drift away from subject pictures in the tentative direction of Impressionism. We saw in chapter 1 that the taste

*Here British taste closely followed that in France, where "indoor scenes of familial or amorous drama, rather than outdoor scenes of military conflicts and Christian miracles," as Robert Rosenblum puts it, came to dominate history painting (Painting 1774-1830: The Age of Revolution [exhibition catalogue, Grand Palais (Paris), Detroit Institute of Arts, and Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1974-75], p. 169).

†The word genre in the sense in which modern art historians apply it to Morland and Wilkie—scenes from the life of the humble in country and town, in the manner of the old Dutch artists—was greatly expanded in nineteenth-century usage; writers at the time were disturbed by its elastic definition, which came to include, as a writer in 1857 said, "a class of works which, taken from polite society or genteel comedy, are especially suited for the drawing-room," such as The Vicar of Wakefield and the writings of Sterne and Addison. By 1883, another writer recognized a fait accompli: the term now also included all kinds of "character and incident painting." Or, as Blackwood's Magazine briskly put it two years later, genre was "an art of a kind not included in any other kind." In these pages, it will be applied to nineteenth-century subject painting with judicious inclusiveness. (Blackwood's 82 [1857]: 167; Fortnightly Review n.s. 33 [1883]: 864; Blackwood's 138 [1885]: 15.)
for genre had been slowly developing in the later eighteenth century. As early as 1761, a Holborn businessman named Charles Jennens, who patronized Hogarth and Hayman, had accumulated more than 100 Dutch paintings, including, we may suppose, a substantial number of genre subjects. 14 Many more arrived at the end of the century, with the great collections that were somehow spirited out of revolutionary France. The Prince Regent himself had a notable collection of Dutch genre art, and in enthusiastic emulation so did a number of other connoisseurs—preeminently Thomas Hope and Sir Robert Peel, who were credited with the biggest collections, and also Sir Francis Bourgeois, Thomas Baring, and John Sheepshanks, who collected this kind of older art before developing his taste for its modern English equivalent. In 1815, the British Institution mounted a large exhibition of Dutch and Flemish masters borrowed from a number of private collections, and in exhibitions of wider scope held in subsequent years, this school predominated.

Thus the first decades of the century witnessed a fruitful conjunction of style and substance. The old Dutch-Flemish school of genre painting, with its concentration on domestic middle-class or rural life, was coming to preside over the taste of an influential body of connoisseurs; and its characteristic subjects, as it happened, were a particular specialty of English literature, or at least of that portion of English poetry and (especially) fiction most valued by readers who were entering the art market for the first time. The subject matter of most genre painting, as of most popular fiction from Richardson, Fielding, Sterne, and Goldsmith to Scott (the monarch of fiction at the time), was the human character in a great variety of situations and moods.

At the same time, genre painting came near to completing the task, begun by Hogarth, of widening the social reference of British art and so accommodating it to the much broader scope of fiction and the poetry that dealt with daily life. The 2,000 portraits that Reynolds and Romney painted between them seldom depicted the faces of men and women outside the world of rank and fashion. Hogarth conspicuously apart, as well as George Stubbs with his figures of grooms, farmhands, and country gentry, eighteenth-century painters had avoided contact with blunt real-
Neither Gainsborough's nor Morland's rural figures, whether cottagers, artisans, children, or beggars, much resembled the real people who endured penury and squalor in the enclosed countryside. They were as untrue to fact as the graceful, expressionless figments of Stothard's imagination, which the widow of his artist-son, the novelist Anna Eliza Bray, contrasted (to his credit) with the creations of Hogarth and the "Dutch drollery" of his precursors. "He led us through the fairy ground of the picturesque and the beautiful," she wrote. His landlords and publicans "do not represent base fellows that would shock a gentlewoman," and "his gipsies, perhaps, are often too like ladies masquerading as gipsies . . . he was, as a painter, aristocratic; he could condescend gracefully to humble or rural life; but he could never descend to low life."15 Nor did any subsequent genre painter descend, except momentarily, to "low life," by which term Mrs. Bray presumably meant a social position even more sunken than the "humble," whether rural or urban. (The lowest level of city life admitted to painting then or later was that of the picturesque street sellers made so familiar in Francis Wheatley's *The Cries of London* [1795].) But in the first decades of the nineteenth century, a mild reaction set in against the Arcadian version of country life sustained by the ele-
gance and dreamy delicacy of Stothard's and his fellow illustrators' designs.

Three strong influences from north of the Tweed—Burns, Scott, and Wilkie—gave impetus to this promising new form of literary art between 1800 and 1820. Burns's poetry and Scott's novels provided fresh and copious sources of genre subjects. As early as 1801, Julius Caesar Ibbetson painted "Duncan Gray cam' here to woo" and "The Cotter's Saturday Night," two subjects from Burns that were destined to be painted over and over in the years to come, the latter especially being a prototypical genre subject, a kind of poor man's conversation piece. Another popular theme from Burns, "Tam o' Shanter," would join the company in 1805. A little later, the Waverley novels, the first of which appeared in 1814, began to be illustrated, the first trickle in what was to become a century-long flood of paintings from Scott's fiction. Many, perhaps the most characteristic, were domestic scenes—historical and narrative genre.

Meanwhile, David Wilkie had come down from Edinburgh with his repertory of genre subjects and his eye for the picturesque in human situations, to receive from the hand of Sir George Beaumont, patron of artists and poets and himself an amateur artist, Hogarth's mahlstick—a fine gesture of symbolic descent. Interspersed among other paintings that won him early celebrity in London, beginning with The Village Politicians (1806) and The Blind Fiddler (1807), were several subjects taken from literature: The Refusal (from "Duncan Gray") (pi. 44), The Cottage Toilette (pl. 135) and Roger Slighted by Jenny (from Allan Ramsay's The Gentle Shepherd) (pl. 291). At the peak of his career, he illustrated scenes in Scott: The Reading of a Will (Guy Mannering), the supper scene in Old Mortality, Julian Peveril and the Dwarf (Peveril of the Peak), and Dumbiedikes and Jeanie Deans (The Heart of Mid-Lothian).

Wilkie's literary affinities were fully appreciated in his own time; indeed, they were among the chief reasons for his popularity. Edward Bulwer, in his panoramic survey of England as it was in 1833, praised him in literary terms:

More various, more extensive in his grasp than even Hogarth, his genius sweeps from the dignity of history to the verge of caricature itself. Humour is the prevalent trait of all minds capable of variety in character; from Shakspeare and Cervantes, to Goldsmith and Smollett. But of what shades and differences is not Humour capable? Now it loses itself in terror—now it broadens into laughter. What a distance from the Mephistophiles of Gothe to Sir Roger de Coverley of Addison, or from Sir Roger de Coverley to Humphrey Clinker! What an illimitable space from the dark power of Hogarth to the graceful tenderness of Wilkie! And which can we say with certainty is the higher of the two? . . . Wilkie is the Goldsmith of painters, in the amiable and pathetic humour, in the combination of smiles and tears, of the familiar and the beautiful; but he has a stronger hold, both over the more secret sympathies and the springs of a broader laughter, than Goldsmith himself.16

As it happened, Wilkie's sensational debut coincided with a revival of interest in the poetry of George Crabbe, whose poem The Village (1781) had been intended to confront the rosy idealization of Goldsmith's The Deserted Village (1770) with the hard facts of rural life. Hazlitt, writing in 1821, associated the poem with the great change he perceived as having occurred in the interim, a trend toward realism in both literary and artistic taste:
Mr. Crabbe’s earliest poem of the Village was recommended to the notice of Dr. Johnson by Sir Joshua Reynolds; and we cannot help thinking that a taste for that sort of poetry, which leans for support on the truth and fidelity of its imitations of nature, began to display itself much about that time, and, in a good measure, in consequence of the direction of the public taste to the subject of painting. Book-learning, the accumulation of wordy common-places, the gaudy pretensions of poetical diction, had enfeebled and perverted our eye for nature: the study of the fine arts, which came into fashion about forty years ago, and was then first considered as a polite accomplishment, would tend imperceptibly to restore it. Painting is essentially an imitative art; it cannot subsist for a moment on empty generalities: the critic, therefore, who had been used to this sort of substantial entertainment, would be disposed to read poetry with the eye of a connoisseur, would be little captivated with smooth, polished, unmeaning periods, and would turn with double eagerness and relish to the force and precision of individual details, transferred, as it were, to the page from the canvas.17

Crabbe’s return to notice with The Borough (1810) provoked considerable soul-searching on the part of those who clung to the ideals of high art. The frequently observed resemblance between his poems and Dutch

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44. David Wilkie, The Refusal (Duncan Gray) (RA 1814) (Victoria & Albert Museum, Crown Copyright). One of Wilkie’s early successes, and one of the first notable pictures taken from the poems of Burns. This is a smaller version of the painting exhibited in 1814. It was painted for George Thomson, in whose Select Collection of Original Scottish Arts many of Burns’s poems were first printed. The rising young artist William Mulready is said to have posed for the figure of Duncan Gray.
painting expanded into a discussion of the basic aesthetic theory that lay behind the rise to dominance of "realistic" genre painting.* A writer in the Christian Observer in 1811, the year Wilkie exhibited The Village Festival and was elected R.A., remarked that Crabbe was inferior to Campbell and Scott "only because his subjects keep him down." He quoted academic Scripture, one of Reynolds’s Discourses: "The painters who have applied themselves more particularly to low and vulgar characters, and who express with precision the various shades of passion as they are exhibited by vulgar minds (such as we see in the works of Hogarth), deserve great praise; but as their genius has been employed on low and confined subjects, the praise that we give must be limited as its object."¹¹ In other words, the identification of "high" art with subjects from the "high" realms of society required that genre and narrative painting of low life occupy a suitably lower place in the hierarchy of kinds. This was precisely the neoclassic premise that, translated into literary terms, made Wordsworth’s experiments in poetic rural genre seem so revolutionary—and unacceptable—to conservative critics.

To it, Crabbe responded in the preface to his Tales in Verse, published the next year:

In this case [i.e., his own] it appears that the usual comparison between Poetry and Painting entirely fails: the Artist who takes an accurate likeness of individuals, or a faithful representation of scenery, may not rank so high in the public estimation, as one who paints an historical event, or an heroic action; but he is nevertheless a painter, and his accuracy is so far from diminishing his reputation, that it procures for him in general both fame and emolument: nor is it perhaps with strict justice determined that the credit and reputation of those verses which strongly and faithfully delineate character and manners, should be lessened in the opinion of the Public by the very accuracy, which gives value and distinction to the productions of the pencil.¹⁹

Assisting this transformation of subject art was the simultaneous emergence of fiction as the most popular literary form. The early presence of the novel had fostered Hogarth’s purpose of adding to the inherited tradition of genre painting the twin elements of narrative and moral meaning that were largely lacking in Dutch and Flemish art, though Greuze had subsequently introduced them in France. As Fielding had said of Hogarth, the artist’s task was to “express the affections of men on canvas” as the novelist expressed them on the printed page.²⁰ And it was the novel that now was ready at hand as new subjects were needed, not to replace the old standbys from Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton, and the other “classics,” for which a steady market remained, but to enlarge the Victorian buyer’s choice. Sterne and Goldsmith, whose popularity as a source of art continued to grow, were joined by Scott and Dickens.† And when novelists did not themselves supply subjects, the symbiotic relation between fiction and art still flourished. Contemporary novels were rich in the very qualities most desired in subject art: plot, dramatic or touching scenes, strong interest in character, unmistakable morality, domesticity, carefully observed “picturesque” details, gentle good-humored comedy.

As we have seen, beginning with Richard Wilson, British landscape artists sometimes inserted more or less casual literary elements in their portrayals of natural scenery. These incidental figures and references to well-known stories, introduced for compositional reasons and particularly in deference to the practice of Claude and Poussin, were, however, as

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*In view of his having occasioned this debate, it is noteworthy that Crabbe himself had strong personal ties to the eighteenth-century school of academic art and aesthetic thought. Reynolds, whom he met through Edmund Burke, was an intimate friend and often entertained him at his house in Leicester Fields.

†George Eliot and Thomas Hardy, two important adapters of Dutch genre art for the purpose of fiction, appeared on the scene only when literary painting had entered its decline. For Eliot, see Part Three, below. Hardy, who studied the genre paintings in the Sheepshanks collection in 1869, was deeply influenced by genre art, and even gave Under the Greenwood Tree the subtitle A Rural Painting of the Dutch School.
far as landscape painters then went in bringing their art and that of the poet into conjunction. At the very end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, Wordsworth’s poems celebrated the scenery of the Lake District in imagery fresher and more vivid than the stilted pictorial language of Thomson, Dyer, and other eighteenth-century landscape poets had permitted. Meanwhile, a few artists like Wright of Derby and Farington had discovered the beauties of the region, as had William Gilpin in the course of his tours in search of the picturesque. But despite the publicity Wordsworth’s poetry gave to the subjects of their paintings, no distinct school of Lake artists, comparable to Crome’s Norwich school, arose alongside the school of Lake poets. The influence of the Lake poets on contemporary art was mostly confined to the inspiration and prestige they lent to landscape art at large, as with Constable.

It was Scott instead, who, almost singlehandedly among authors, touched off the century-long fashion of literary landscapes—paintings whose association with a poem or novel was not contrived and remote, as had been the case with purported pictures of the Forest of Arden in As You Like It, but intentional and direct. Beginning with the publication of *The Lady of the Lake* in 1810, and proceeding at an increased pace after Scott turned to fiction, English landscapists discovered in his poetry and novels a limitless reservoir of subjects. His romances, after all, were more replete with extended natural descriptions—paintings in words—than were those of any other novelist. (The incidence in Mrs. Radcliffe’s fiction had been equally high, but she published only half a dozen novels whereas Scott at certain junctures was publishing three long ones in a single year.) Along with the tourists who flocked to the Highlands to enjoy for themselves the picturesque or sublime scenes Scott described came troops of professional and amateur artists bent on capturing those scenes in oil or watercolor. The engravings made from their renderings helped feed the appetite for illustrated books, and from 1811 onward, no exhibition was without paintings representing Scott topography. In addition to the hundreds explicitly identified as Scott landscapes, it is reasonable to suppose that every representation of Scottish scenery owed at least part of its saleability to its association, however faintly implicit, with the Wizard of the North.

Indeed, as had been true since English landscape painting had made its first tentative bid to evoke the feelings that the poetry of nature aroused more extensively (see chapter 1, above), association was at the very heart of the appeal such paintings possessed. Whatever intrinsic aesthetic value they had (and many had little), they almost without exception exploited the emotional content with which Scott had infused the scene. “... Every old ruin, hill, river, or tree,” said Coleridge, “called up in his mind a host of historical or biographical associations,—just as a bright pan of brass, when beaten, is said to attract the swarming of bees...”

Scott was his own witness. The village of Kelso, he wrote on one occasion, presents objects, not only grand in themselves, but venerable from their association. The meeting of two superb rivers, the Tweed and the Teviot, both renowned in song—the ruins of an ancient Abbey—the more distant vestiges of Roxburgh Castle—the modern mansion of Fleurs, which is so situated as to combine the ideas of ancient baronial grandeur with those of modern taste—are in themselves objects of the first class; yet are so mixed, united, and melted among a thousand other beauties of a less prominent description, that they
Paintings inspired by Scott's descriptions in prose and verse, therefore, contained a double set of associations: the manifold ones of history and legend that had coalesced in Scott's own imagination, and those evoked by the poem or novel that had been fed by that imagination—the characters and stories to which the topography had served as a memory-laden background.

Among all the artists who sooner or later illustrated Scott, the greatest was Turner, whose watercolors of locales figuring in Scott's poetry and his prose apart from the novels marked an epoch in his career. One of Turner's main links with literary painting, a retrograde one to be sure, is the way in which he gradually removed from his own form of landscape art the poetic associations he had invoked, conforming with the practice of the time, in the first phase of his career. In this phase, he had more or less regularly, and routinely, given his landscapes Poussinesque titles borrowed from mythology and tagged them with quotations from the poets, including his own purpose-made source of verses, *The Fallacies of Hope*. In addition, again like Poussin and Wilson, he had sometimes inserted tiny figures from poetry into his scenes to give the landscapes the desired literary associations. But as he moved into his "expressionist" phase, though the tags from *The Fallacies of Hope* persisted, Turner dropped the other literary trimmings except in a few canvases such as *Juliet and Her Nurse* (1836) and *A Street in Venice*, with its figure of Shylock (1837).

This was not true, however, of the numerous Victorian painters of landscape who gave literary figures a prominent place in their compositions. As recognizable characters with their own associations, who lent their names or the name of their literary source to the title of the painting, these figures now costarred with Nature. As with history painting and genre, so with landscapes and subjects from literature: the boundaries between them were largely obscured.