Dismayed by the final passage, the night before, of the Reform Bill of 1832 and inferring from the event an odd non sequitur, Thomas Uwins wrote to his fellow artist Joseph Severn: “But whether art will ever become fashionable again is rather doubtful. The habits of the people are greatly opposed to it. Marriage is almost at an end amongst the higher and middle classes; single men have neither house nor establishment. They hire a bed-room in a garret, and live in splendour and in society, at the different club-houses.”

Few prophecies of the time were confounded more promptly by events, in this case the expansion of the market for art. With our eyes fixed, as they usually are, on a relative handful of well-known paintings from the Victorian era, it is easy to forget that even before the age began, the production and sale of fine art had become a considerable business. When William Cobbett, the firebrand journalist then in the process of conversion from Toryism to left-wing radicalism, furnished his home in a Hampshire village in 1805, he bought the contents of one entire wall in Colnaghi’s print shop. For these he paid, or undertook to pay (for Colnaghi’s terms were “as long as that of a Lord or a Prince”) the great, and in his case foolhardy, sum of £500. Collections of art could be found in unexpected places. Five years later, when the Reverend Dr. George Tennyson moved into his rectory in a remote part of Lincolnshire, he hung in the drawing room an accumulation of paintings—perhaps inherited—known to the locals as “’eathen gods and goddesses wi’out cloäś”; yet his annual income was no more than about £450.

It may well be that Carlyle expressed the sentiments of most middle-class Victorians when he growled to his friend the painter-poet William Bell Scott, “Airt, airt, what is it all about? I’ve never been to the Exhibition
all the time that I've been in London, and don't mean to go, and more than that I believe if all art, except good portraits, faces, of great men well done, if all art but these was swept out of the world we would be all the better! The prevalent utilitarian ethos discouraged the production of art as a waste of one segment of the nation's industrial capacity. But the records of the trade assure us that there were enough bourgeois collectors of pictures to redeem the class from absolute darkness. They, along with the old-line aristocratic collectors, constituted a steadily growing market, ready to soak up much of the annual output of the studios insofar as it caught their fancy, as well as to acquire previously owned properties.

The total production down to the end of the century of the several branches of the graphic and plastic arts in Britain could be conservatively reckoned high in six figures. Unfortunately, most of the statistics found in contemporary records do not distinguish among these various types. The term most often used, "items," ordinarily referred to pictures and sculpture of all kinds, and "pictures" or "pictorial works" often comprised not only oil paintings and watercolors but engravings, miniatures, enamels, etchings, architectural drawings, and other peripheral forms of graphic art as well. But by appreciating how large the total annual output was, we can obtain a rough idea of the size of the commerce in which literary paintings participated.

At the Royal Academy, some 100,000 "items" were shown during the sixty-four Victorian years; at the British Institution during its entire career, 1806–67, more than 28,000; and at the third and least prestigious of the long-lived exhibiting institutions, the Society of British Artists, 1824–93, some 110,000. (No comparable totals seem to be available for the "old" and "new" watercolor societies.) Between 1830 and 1899, the number displayed annually at the Royal Academy rose, with temporary setbacks, from 1,278 in 1830 to more than 1,500 in 1846, 1,600 in 1872, and 2,000 in 1899. The average number of items at the British Institution ranged from 250 to 300 in the early years to 500 or 600 in the 1850s. In both 1832 and 1858, the Society of British Artists admitted about 1,000 works. To these totals must be added the undeterminable number of paintings at the various provincial exhibitions, which included much local work as well as pictures brought down from London. But, as was pointed out in the Introduction, the record of exhibited work represents only a small proportion of the whole output. Charles Robert Leslie, a newcomer to the London art scene, heard in 1813 that at the Royal Academy that year upward of 1,000 pictures were exhibited and about 500 rejected. By 1848, the proportion was reversed: only a third of the works submitted were accepted, and not all of these could be hung because of the limited wall space in the Trafalgar Square building that the academy shared with the National Gallery. Even the less selective British Institution turned down a substantial number, more than 300 in 1842 as against 445 accepted. And even in the more spacious quarters in Burlington House, to which it moved in 1869, the Royal Academy had room for only 18,252 out of 82,789 items submitted between 1880 and 1899; and at the very end of the century, the ratio of rejections to acceptances was about 6.5 to one. There is no way of estimating the number of paintings that passed from the artist's studio to the buyer's home, either directly or by way of a dealer, and finally, the multitude of inglorious pictures that were neither submitted to an exhibition nor sold.
It is reasonable to suppose that in these categories of unrecorded pictures, paintings with literary subjects would have figured in the same proportion to the over-all total as they bore to the total listed in the exhibition catalogues. But without laborious analysis of each catalogue, one cannot obtain a dependable notion of the relative incidence of literary paintings even in the total recorded production of a given year, and even then the results would be inconclusive. A rare indication of distribution is found in the statement of Benjamin Robert Haydon's biographer that "between 1823 and 1833, 1,398 'poetical and historical works' were exhibited at the Academy, as against 5,093 portraits."

The market changed rapidly in the first half of the century in respect both to the persons buying and to the products bought. Until the last decades of the eighteenth century, most serious collectors of art were aristocrats and commoners of inherited wealth. But the autocratic reign of the Old Masters in private English collections was coming to a close. Several forward-looking and patriotic patrons of the arts, Lord Mulgrave, Lord Egremont, and Sir George Beaumont, representative of an old county family, took an unprecedented interest in the advancement of young artists. Lord Egremont, who had begun collecting in 1775, gradually gave up buying Old Masters in favor of encouraging native talent, notably, in his later years, as Turner's chief patron and hospitable host.

The fifth Earl of Essex, the Duke of Bedford, the Marquis of Stafford, Lords Northwick, Lansdowne, and Yarborough, and Sir John Leicester, later Lord de Tabley, also were among the blue-blooded patrons of English art.

But everyone who commented on the English art world from the earliest Victorian days onward stressed that the chief collectors now were no longer aristocratic connoisseurs but members of the middle class, who were uninterested in the Italian and French masters so avidly collected by noblemen. They preferred instead old works painted for a bourgeois society like their own, still lifes, landscapes, and (above all, for our purposes) sentimental, anecdotal, narrative genre subjects in which art came closest to reflecting their own experience and the everyday world they lived in.

Conspicuous among this clientele were owners of the mercantile and manufacturing fortunes that had multiplied in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars, an open-pursed breed of men not unmindful of the then-surprising fact that in 1827 Lord de Tabley's collection of more than 100 modern English pictures, including half a dozen subjects from English literature, had sold for substantially more than he had paid for them. Their confidence in art as a profitable investment was amply justified in the course of time. In 1863, the prices realized at the Bicknell sale represented spectacular increases over the purchase prices; and nine years later, Joseph Gillott's collection brought £164,530, far in excess of his expenditure. Soon the aristocrats were far outnumbered by rich commoners in the art market: William Wells of Redleaf, shipbuilder; the elder Sir Robert Peel, cotton manufacturer; Jacob Bell, pharmaceutical chemist; Joseph Gillott of Birmingham, maker of steel pen nibs; Elhanan Bicknell, who made a fortune trading in whale oil to feed the nation's lamps; John Gibbons, Staffordshire ironmaster; Samuel Dobree, City merchant; Henry McConnell, Manchester textile magnate; Benjamin Windus, Bishopsgate coachmaker; and, most important of all because
both men give their collections to the nation, to form the two most valuable concentrations of Victorian painting. John Sheepshanks, sleeping partner in a Leeds clothiers firm, and Robert Vernon, whose money came from trading in horses during the wars. The appendix of the autobiography of Leslie, one of the most popular painters of subjects from English literature, contains a list of the men (and one or two women, such as the banking heiress Angela Burdett Coutts) who bought pictures from him between 1813, when he first exhibited, and 1859, the year of his death. A substantial majority, among whom were some of the persons just mentioned, bore no titles of dignity.
One of Leslie's patrons was the celebrated engineer Isambard Kingdom Brunel, with whom the artist's son studied. In his office-cum-residence in Duke Street, St. James's, Brunel had a large dining room that he proceeded to decorate with commissioned pictures of Shakespearean subjects. Leslie coordinated the project, which when completed included three of his own paintings, two from *Henry VIII* and the third from *The Winter's Tale*. Clarkson Stanfield, a marine painter somewhat out of his element, depicted the blasted heath in *Macbeth* (pl. 49); Sir Edwin Landseer, availing himself of the opportunity to paint fairies as well as the animals and human beings to which he was more accustomed, did a picture of Titania and Bottom surrounded by the cast of the Athenian wood scenes in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; and John Callcott Horsley, Brunel's brother-in-law, presented *Launce Reproving His Dog*, from *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*—a reworking of a picture his uncle, Augustus Wall Callcott, had left unfinished at his death in 1844. These canvases, elaborately framed, hanging on walls that looked like oak paneling but were really plaster, and flanked by Venetian mirrors and red velvet curtains, looked down on a dining table "staggering like Atlas," says Brunel's modern biographer, "under the weight of monstrous silver-gilt centre and side pieces presented by the Great Western Railway Company," which was Brunel's own creation. The ponderous tableware suggests the festive board of the Podsnaps, in Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*. But we are not told that Mr. Podsnap affected a love of Shakespeare.

The unmistakable fact that the Captain of Industry and the Merchant Prince had succeeded the eighteenth-century Man of Taste as the decisive arbiters of English art aroused mixed feelings among concerned onlookers. Some interpreted the *nouveau riche* Philistine's domination of

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45. George B. O'Neill, *The Foundling* (RA 1852) (Tate Gallery, London). A narrative genre picture which was exhibited with a quotation from Crabbe's *The Parish Register* ("1. Baptisms"): To name an infant meet our village-sires, Assembled all, as such event requires: Frequent and full, the rural sages sate. And speakers many urged the long debate,— Some harden'd knaves, who roved the country round, Had left a babe within the parish-bound.

The painting was in the collection of Jacob Bell, a wealthy pharmaceutical chemist who had a closer personal experience of the art world than did either Sheepshanks or Vernon. As a young man, he had simultaneously studied chemistry at the Royal Institution and painting with the Academician Henry Perronet Briggs. Before he was in his mid-twenties, he had formed the nucleus of his art collection, the best part of which he bequeathed to the nation in 1839.
49. Clarkson Stanfield, Macbeth: The Blasted Heath (RA 1850) (Leicestershire Museum and Art Gallery, Leicester). One of the few pictures with literary associations that were painted by this specialist in marine scenes; commissioned by the engineer Isambard Kingdom Brunel for his London house. Stanfield converts the witches from midnight hags to nothing more supernatural than barefoot crofters’ wives resting by the wayside, and the blasted heath becomes a Scottish loch.

*The most recent rule of thumb for converting Victorian monetary sums into their approximate present-day equivalents has been to multiply by twenty-five or thirty. The appreciation in value of some select examples of British nineteenth-century art far exceeds this factor, as was sensationally demonstrated in 1984, when Turner’s Sea­scape: Folkstone was sold at auction in Lon­don for the equivalent of $10,000,000. The previous record had been set by Bicknell paid from 250 to 400 guineas apiece for nine Turners, £161 10s. for a pair of Thomas Webster’s genre paintings, from £40 to 300 guineas for several canvases by David Roberts, and £150 for a single Clarkson Stanfield. In 1840, Leslie’s scene of Victoria’s coronation brought him 600 guineas. Five years later, Gillott commissioned The Judgement of Paris from Etty for 600 guineas. In 1850–59, Bicknell bought three Landseer paintings for between 300 and 400 guineas each; but in 1860, Frith’s The Railway Station commanded the record sum of £5,250, surpassed later in the same year by Holman Hunt’s Christ in the Temple. The prices initially brought by literary paintings in particular were in line with the general averages, as the list given in Appendix B shows.

It was not to the mansions of the wealthy, however, but to the homes of the modestly comfortable that the great majority of new paintings gravitated. Hundreds of pictures exhibited at the British Institution and the
Society of British Artists were priced at only a few guineas, no more than would have bought two or three recently published books. (The conventional three-decker novel cost 31s.6d., or a guinea and a half.) It is items on this price level, ordinarily small cabinet pictures with unelaborated compositions and requiring little wall space, that swell the records of nineteenth-century British painting. This was the bargain-basement precinct of contemporary art, where the prevailing taste was reflected en masse.

Every artist who relied on his palette and easel for his livelihood had to defer to that taste. Wilkie, whose career, once well launched, depended as much as any artist's on his pleasing his wealthy patrons, stated the case candidly enough: "... Patrons visit the artist's studio, saying, 'we are not judges of the article, but we know what pleases us:' and they order a picture—be it portrait, landscape, domestic scene, or poetic painting—accordingly. To know, then, the taste of the public—to learn what will best please the employer—is to an artist the most valuable of all knowledge, and the most useful to him whose skill and fancy it calls into exercise." If Wilkie, originally a poor Scottish boy whose subsequent eminence in his profession won him a knighthood and, at his death, a great memorial painting by Turner, felt such pressure, it was felt much more acutely by the undistinguished painters whose pictures constituted all but a small fraction of the yearly output. Amateur or professional, they were as much hacks as the equally motley crowd of penny-a-liners who fed the presses in this era of a portentously expanding audience for reading matter. The remark of the totally uninspired artist Henry Gowan, in *Little Dorrit,* did little credit to him (as Dickens intended) or to the idealism of his profession, but it was an accurate statement of its realities: "... What I do in my trade, I do to sell. What all we fellows do, we do to sell. If we didn't want to sell it for the most we can get for it, we shouldn't do it. Being work, it has to be done; but it's easily enough done. All the rest is hocus-pocus" (chap. 34). It was recognition of this manifest subservience to crass fashion, so ill comporting with the Romantic conception of the artist who follows his highest private vision and selflessly fulfills his appointed function of purifying and inspiring every human being reached by his art, that soured some of the day's art journalism. The intended destiny of most of the paintings shown at the exhibitions, it was thought, fatally corrupted contemporary art. As a reviewer of the Royal Academy show of 1843 put it, "Now, if out of these 1,530 [works] there be, peradventure, fifty, or twenty, or even five, which have not been painted for Art-Unions, or Annuals, or fashionable boudoirs, or to please the million, but for fair fame and its just reward, we may rejoice over the salvation of Art. . . ." If one commonplace of the time was that a new, demotic market for art had materialized, another, equally pervasive, was that pictures were now almost solely designed for domestic use—a fact that influenced not only the choice and treatment of subject matter, as we shall see in the next chapter, but the physical size of paintings, which had its own bearing on subject matter. From the very eighteenth-century moment when history painting began to claim the veneration of ambitious English artists, one practical objection to it was its scale: there was no place to hang pictures of such grandiose dimensions. Hogarth said, "For historical pictures there never can be a demand; our churches reject them; . . . and the generality of our apartments are too small to contain them."
In the 1840s, to be sure, no less an institution than Parliament came to the rescue of artists who thought in outsize dimensions with its scheme to decorate the new Houses of Parliament with frescoes from Shakespeare, Spenser, and Milton (see chapter 8, below). The rules for the contest that was set up to discover the painters eligible for commissions required that figures in the cartoons (preliminary sketches) should be "not less than ten nor more than fifteen feet in their longest dimension." If the grand style was too outdated to be wholly insisted upon, on this occasion grand size was given encouragement such as it had seldom before enjoyed in Britain. But few walls outside Westminster had space for such machines.

J. C. Horsley's entry in the 1846 competition, a picture of Prince Hal taking the crown from his father's bedside, won a £200 premium, but its sheer height (twelve feet) deprived it of a home until, after the several months required to enlarge his art gallery to receive it, Sir William Armstrong, the wealthy inventor, installed it in his mansion at Newcastle.

It would seem that most of the wealthy connoisseurs whose stately homes could accommodate what was properly public-monument art were already adequately supplied with it (mostly genuine or bogus Old Masters) and were not often moved to replace it with freshly painted pictures. Realization of the space problem was behind the note in the sale catalogue of the Boydell Shakespeare Gallery in 1805: "Many of the above Pictures are of the Cabinet size, and the Remainder will be found worthy objects for the large saloons of the Nobility and Gentry, or the Halls of Incorporate Bodies, or for Exhibition in distant Parts of the Kingdom." That large pictures were a drag on the market, even then, is implicit in the low prices some brought at the Boydell sale, as well as in Fuseli's failure to sell off the pictures from the Milton Gallery.

Throughout the period, there were artists such as Haydon and Martin whose ambitions and talents were firmly pointed toward the epic size, notwithstanding the commercial disadvantage of such spacious canvases. Martin's early painting of Macbeth on the blasted heath (BI 1820), for example, measured 68 by 98 inches. David Scott, dying in 1849, left behind him, among other paintings, three "ambitious, imperfect, yet grand unsold works," one of which portrayed Lady Macbeth smearing the grooms with blood from her husband's dripping dagger. In 1872, the painter James Smetham saw them in the studio of David’s brother William. "There they are," he wrote; "deep in colour, blistered with the sun, mildewy, brown, in solemn, energetic, heavy epic, needing the interpretation of much knowledge and sympathy. There is scarce any one who would buy them, though many would admire and be impressed by them. They are too big to buy at random. Where are they to be put?"

There always was a small market for large canvases, however, if the right name were signed to them. Toward the end of the century, Burne-Jones's magnum opus The Sleep of King Arthur in Avalon, on which he was still working when he died, measured 21 feet 2 inches by 9 feet 3 inches. But this was one of the exceptions that proved the rule.

Since size and subject were to some extent related, as they had been historically, these twin considerations took painters in the same direction, away from subjects associated with large canvases (history pictures) and toward those associated with, and most congenial to, smaller paintings (portraits and figure studies, and dramatic and narrative genre in domes-
tic settings). And although English literature contained many subjects well suited to large-scale pictorial treatment, especially in such poets as Shakespeare and Milton, it contained many more that were better adapted to the intimate confines of the medium- or small-size picture. Prosaic requirements of square feet and inches were not among the loftiest determinants of taste, but they undoubtedly counted.

If there was less uninterrupted wall space available in the houses built for the newly wealthy as well as the merely prosperous portion of the middle class, the aggregate space suitable for art was much greater than ever before. It is scarcely possible to exaggerate the degree to which Victorian art was affected by the spread of middle-class housing in cities and towns, its wall areas offering so many more millions of square feet to hang pictures on, even if the individual paintings had to be small. Seldom if ever in the history of Western art, except in seventeenth-century Holland, were paintings bought in such large quantities primarily for use as household decoration. Almost at the same moment that Uwins was declaring that art was dead because current domestic habits provided no place to put it, Bulwer, in his England and the English (1833), commented: "It is rather a singular fact, that in no country abroad do you see many pictures in the houses of the gentry or lesser nobles. But with us they are a necessary part of furniture. A house-agent taking a friend of mine over a London house the other day, and praising it to the skies, concluded with, "And when, sir, the dining-room is completely furnished—handsome red curtains, sir—and twelve good "furniture pictures"—it will be a perfect nonpareil! The pictures were as necessary as the red curtains."29*

This was no convenient Bulwerian fantasy; pictures were, in fact, valued for their mere contribution to décor. Sometimes this was the only consideration. In 1856, when Tennyson and his wife moved into their home at Farringford, they found that his father's pictures were insufficient to cover the stains on the wallpaper, and Emily asked their friend Thomas Woolner, the sculptor, to look out at pawnbrokers' for some paintings of "red and flesh colour and bright frames." She was partial, she said, to "oldest copies of oldest pictures to be sold for one farthing each barring the discount on ready money."30 A few years later, Edward FitzGerald, a compulsive buyer of inexpensive (five to ten pounds) paintings he optimistically believed were from the brushes of celebrated artists, wrote to his friend George Crabbe, grandson of the poet: "I have just bought an Early Gainsboro' which Churchyard has had for years: I bought it because it was light, bright, cheerful, and making a good figure in my Room. I now have made almost the best I can of such Pictures as I have, and sit and survey my handywork with considerable Pleasure. But I must one Day oust some of the Black things and get lighter. I am sure that dark Venetian's Head you have would improve by having the edges rounded off with Gold Panel. . . ."31

Emily Tennyson and FitzGerald exemplified the mid-Victorian spirit insofar as the domestic usefulness of art was concerned. Two years before the latter acquired his dubious Gainsborough (1860), the pioneer historians of British art, Richard and Samuel Redgrave, wrote, using a strikingly modern phrase,

It was soon found that pictures to suit the English taste must be pictures to live by; pictures to hang on the walls of that home in which the Englishman spends more of his time than do the men of other nations, and loves to see cheerful and

*It was in the same passage that Bulwer (ironically?) defended the Royal Academy's governance of contemporary art on the ground that "though it has not fostered genius, it has diffused through a large circle a respectable mediocrity, that is, it has made the standard of the Mediocre several degrees higher than it was before."
PAINTINGS FROM BOOKS

decorative. . . . His eye, too, must be pleased before his mind, and colour is to him one of the first sources of gratification.³² (Emphasis added.)

So long as furniture pictures were chosen for their harmony with a room’s décor, their subjects, within certain agreed-upon limitations, were largely irrelevant; the colors mattered more, as the Redgraves said and as Emily Tennyson and FitzGerald implied. When such harmony was achieved, paintings could heighten the pleasures of social life. Writing of the evocations of eighteenth-century society painted by Leslie and others, a contributor to Blackwood’s Magazine in 1857 remarked:

How delightfully charming is a painting of silks and satins—how well, when hung in the drawing-room, it matches with the new curtains and the gay carpet—how well the elegant attitudes and manners of the people in the picture comport with the elegant trifling in society, with the graceful compliments which pass around the piano, and the sotto voce conversation which serves as an accompaniment to songs of conventional sentiment! Thus how complete is the accordance between art and society; and how can pictures fail of pleasing, which thus satisfy the highest needs of “evening parties?” “High Art” were an intrusion.³³

It were indeed.

But the sensibilities of the people who lived with the pictures day in and day out had to be considered too. Art of whatever sort was depended upon to supply life and color to daily surroundings that were otherwise drab, to import the scenery and atmosphere of distant places, to widen the family circle to include men, women, and children from history and literature as well as figures in quaint genre studies. Pictures on the walls were to serve the eye as books on the shelves served the mind; both sought the same goal, the wholesome expansion of the imagination and thus the enrichment of inner lives. They often had a more intimate value as little shrines on the wall, their subjects—a face, a natural vista—conjuring up memories of departed relatives or happy occasions in the country; they served as a visual focus of private sentiment. In 1836, Wilkie described

50. Edward M. Ward, The Disgrace of Clarendon (signed and dated 1861) (Sheffield City Art Galleries). One of several versions Ward painted of this scene, beginning in 1846. As a populous costume piece, it would have met the specification of the Blackwood’s writer four years earlier (see text): “a painting of silks and satins . . . elegant attitudes and manners.” Supposedly, too, the people who trifled below it at evening parties were unaware of, or unperturbed by, the story behind the scene: the departure from Charles II’s frivolous court of Lord Clarendon, a high official of comparative probity, brought low by the failure of the Dutch War and the intrigue of the court. Ward’s widow wrote (Memories of Ninety Years [New York, 1925], p. 46) that the picture was based on an incident described by Pepys, but here her memory misled her, though it is true that Pepys did chronicle, day by day, the prolonged drama of Clarendon’s decline and fall. Macaulay threw additional light on the scene: “On the vices of the young and gay [Clarendon] looked with an aversion almost as bitter and contemptuous as that which he felt for the theological errors of the sectaries. He missed no opportunity of showing his scorn of the mimics, revelers, and courtiers who crowded the palace” (History of England, chap. 2).
what he conceived, no doubt rightly, art meant to the average picture-lover:

The possessor of a picture regards it not in reference to the hand which produces it, nor as one whose view of it has been hasty and fleeting; he thinks alone of the sentiment and feeling of the work, and the lasting impression which it makes on his mind; and regards it as possessing matter for thought, as a companion for the leisure hour, holding up in its solemn stillness an image which he loves, perpetuating the vanishing smile and the never-to-be-forgotten glance of one perhaps long since passed and gone, or the hue of the changing foliage, or the lustre of the fleeting cloud, beauteous.

"As if an angel, in his upward flight,
Had left his garment floating in mid air:"

all of which, and much more, arrested and rendered abiding by the sorcery of art, are kept treasured in the reflecting mind, affording to the possessor materials of pleasure, and a permanent source of pure enjoyment.\(^3^4\)

Art therefore (one must never forget that this was the age of Ruskin) had a definable moral mission to a society built around mills and mines. To believe that it actually succeeded in ministering to people's hearts was to reaffirm one's faith in both art and industry. "It is pleasant for me," said Tom Taylor, Leslie's biographer,

\[51\] Frederick Goodall, *Village Festival* (RA 1847) (Tate Gallery, London). A typical "picture to live by." Its spirit—that of a *féte champêtre* with selective suggestions of Brueghel—was epitomized in the quotation from Milton's "L'Allegro" that accompanied it:

When the merry bells ring round,
And the jocund rebeks sound
To many a youth and many a maid
Dancing in the chequered shade;
And young and old come forth to play
On a sunshine holyday.
The taste of Victorian collectors can be inferred most comprehensively from the pictures they commissioned or bought at the exhibitions. But we are fortunate to have private testimony from one such collector, John Gibbons, the Staffordshire ironmaster, whose letters in the mid-1840s to W. P. Frith, one of the artists he patronized, offer the only oasis in the drear wasteland that is the third volume of Frith's autobiography. On the whole, Gibbons's preferences would seem to have been those of most of his art-loving contemporaries, although he was more thoughtful and more articulate in expressing them. (See also Kathryn Moore Heleniak, "John Gibbons and William Mulready: The Relationship between a Patron and a Painter," Burlington Magazine 124 [1982]: 136–41.)

Of course, nowhere are generalizations more suspect than in the history of taste. Was it true that rich merchant kings and small businessmen shared the same expectations and the same gratifications in art? Certainly they agreed on broad moral and aesthetic principles. Some distinction should be made, no doubt, between those who treasured paintings as trophies of material success, as status symbols—and therefore favored large (within the confines of their rooms) and imposing canvases—and those who merely had wall space for a few five-guinea pictures to be "lived with." Various portions of the art-loving public might also be differentiated by their literary allegiances, a distinction made by a reviewer of John Knowles's biography of Fuseli in 1831:

Shakespeare is the poet of all ranks; the theatre has familiarized us with the creatures of his fancy; we see them again on canvass, as old acquaintances, and delight to compare the ideas of the artist with our own; but Milton is the poet of the scholar, and the man of refinement, to many almost unknown, familiar only to very few. He appeals too little to ordinary sympathies, and confines himself too exclusively to the elevated and the terrible to be the favourite of the crowd.

There probably was also a difference between the taste of the old-line patrons of art, who were accustomed to buying works by Old Masters and their lesser contemporaries and therefore were more receptive to subjects found there, and that of newcomers to the market, whose preferences were more decisively influenced, and their range of choice narrowed, by the Victorian bourgeois ethos. But, such considerations apart, it seems likely that there was no major difference between the subjects of pictures chosen by the wealthy connoisseur and the suburbanite. In addition, there was the powerful force of emulation: middle-class picture-buyers who had ambitions beyond their present station wanted the same kind of art that their betters bought. The fact that artists often painted smaller replicas of their successful canvases points to the profit to be had in obliging budget buyers with mini-copies of the rich man's original.

In earlier Victorian years—the evidence is less strong for the later ones—the pictures on the wall "illustrated" the middle-class family's fireside activities. Paintings from Shakespeare or Scott witnessed the readings aloud from plays or novels that were so memorable a part of domestic entertainment. Some of the favorite ballads and elocution pieces that were recited in the course of an evening's family gathering, poems by Burns or Hood's "The Dream of Eugene Aram," for example, were also favorite subjects for artistic treatment. And furniture pictures of a literary cast complemented two other pieces of furniture, pianos and drawing-room tables, and the household activities associated with them.

On the music racks shown in such well-known Victorian pictures as Holman Hunt's The Awakening Conscience and Redgrave's The Governess would have been found the sheet music of songs taken from artists' customary literary sources. In such a domestic setting, the sister arts became a trio. Moore's Irish Melodies, written to be sung to piano accompaniment, were represented by numerous paintings and engravings. Popular novels were as fertile a source of parlor balladry as they were of parlor art.
Dickens inspired songs about Little Nell and at least one duet between Paul and Florence Dombey; from Bulwer-Lytton came songs like one from *The Last Days of Pompeii* ("The wind and the beam loved the rose"); from Charles Kingsley, a rich selection including the popular "The Three Fishers." One John Blockley ransacked the best-loved poetry of the day in search of lyrics. Like artists, he found texts in the sentimental works of Felicia Hemans, Caroline Norton, Eliza Cook, and other writers of keepsake verse, and above all in Tennyson. From "Enoch Arden" alone came the germs (not the actual words) of a whole cycle of affecting songs, "The Fisherman’s Boat," "The Golden Lock of Hair," "Enoch’s Farewell," and "Enoch Arden’s Dream."

Many of these songs had no more substantial relation to their literary sources than did the equivalent pictures. But in spirit they were completely harmonious. Both modes were laden with mawkish sentiment expressed in imagistic clichés. They shared common themes, such as the suffering and death of children, home sweet home (the sentiment of innumerable domestic genre paintings), and the perils of the sea.

On the drawing-room table, meanwhile, could be found volumes or portfolios of engravings, a fourth component in the home experience of literature and art. Alongside, and to a certain extent overlapping, the public that bought original paintings at whatever price was the larger public that formed a market for engravings made from paintings, the market liberally served in the latter half of the eighteenth century by Alderman Boydell and his lucrative warehouse in Cheapside. Collecting prints and displaying them, either framed on the walls or in portfolios to be leafed through on rainy days for the entertainment of guests (including daughters’ suitors, who found the examination of prints side by side on a sofa the closest one could get to one’s beloved) was an agreeable, undemanding, and relatively inexpensive custom. No matter that even the most elegantly produced engravings were a poor substitute for paintings, lacking, as Hazlitt said, "the size of life, the marble flesh, the rich tones of nature" and being "for the most part but hints, loose memorandums, outlines in little of what the painter has done." Inadequate though black-and-white reductions were by their very nature, they still brought pictures into many households where no other art existed. The engraved, if not precisely graven, image was admissible to neo-Puritan homes where scruples against sensuousness barred pictures in color, no matter how unexceptionable their subjects.

But much more important was the role of engravings in widening the public interest in fine art. Press reports of the current exhibitions at the Royal Academy and the British Institution meant more to readers when they could look forward to the most popular, if not necessarily the best, paintings hung there being engraved and thus available for hanging, by surrogate, on domestic walls. Moreover, far from being mere substitutes for a superior kind of art, engravings had a long tradition of connoisseurship of their own, with aesthetic criteria as strict as those that applied to painting. The tastes and trends reflected in literary paintings were fully operative when the pictures were reproduced and distributed to a market many times greater than that for the paintings themselves, a still more democratic middle-class public most of whose members never attended an exhibition.

As early as Hogarth’s time, engravings had conveyed his and other
Several processes, of course, existed by which actual color could be introduced into prints. Besides hand-coloring, there were chromoxylography (printing from woodcuts) and, later, chromolithography. Familiar though "chromos" were in domestic circles, however, they seldom represented literary subjects.

Down to near the middle of the century, the sale record for prints was held by Stothard's famous Canterbury Pilgrims, engraved by Luigi Schiavonetti and James Heath in 1807 (see Part Three, below, under Chaucer). Meanwhile, the whole engraving industry had been undergoing a revolution. Lithography, mezzotint, and aquatint, with their capacity for tonal effects, imitated, as line engraving could not, the "painterly" qualities of pictures. And, most important, the number of copies that could be struck off in a single edition sharply increased. Steel engraving, introduced about 1822, combined with the electrotyping process, perfected about 1845, to allow as many as 20,000 to 30,000 prints to be made from a single plate without excessive loss of quality. For mass-production work, however, the old process of engraving on wood, now improved, was found capable of even more efficient and economical results, so that as cheap illustrated magazines increased in popularity after mid-century, it began to supersede the metal process.

Distribution of these prints was chiefly in the hands of a growing branch of the art and publishing industry, the printsellers, 126 of whom were registered with their trade organization between 1847 and 1894. In that span of time, these successors of Boydell and Macklin claimed property rights in nearly 5,000 engravings, a due proportion of which had literary subjects. The most influential, and for that reason the most controversial, single distributor of engravings was the nonprofit Art Union, established in 1837. Each subscriber—there were 12,000 by 1841—was entitled to receive a copy of an engraving the union produced each year. But the heart of the operation was the annual lottery, each of whose winners could choose, up to the amount of his prize, a currently exhibited painting. The first prize was a picture costing no more than £200, a figure that, as we have seen, was considerably lower than the level at which works by the most popular artists were then selling. Most of the prizes were valued at no more than ten or twenty pounds, a limitation, ostensibly meant to encourage "recruits rather than veterans," which in practice simply encouraged artists to paint pictures to the taste of people who had no more than that to spend on art. This accounts, in part, for the plethora of paintings tagged at five or ten guineas at the British Institution and the Society of British Artists. To publicize its mission, the Art Union held an annual exhibition of the works selected by the prize winners and, for a time, published annual volumes with engravings of these paintings. In 1842, it gave a special boost to literary painting by urging its prize winners to "give a preference to Historical pictures illustrative of the Bible, British History, or British Literature," in anticipation of the coming Westminster frescoes competition. Seven years later, it issued a well-received album of thirty woodcuts illustrating "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso."

Predictably, this hopeful, and initially very successful, operation in behalf of disseminating the arts among "the people"—one of many exam-
pies of the burst of interest in improving popular taste that marked the 1830s and 1840s—had its critics. “The Art Union,” grumbled Samuel Rogers, the octogenarian collector of Old Masters, at one of his famous breakfast levees, “is a perfect curse: it buys and engraves very inferior pictures, and consequently encourages mediocrity of talent; it makes young men, who have no genius, abandon the desk and counter, and set up for painters.” In 1844, when the union ran temporarily afoul of the law that prohibited lotteries and its treasury was confiscated, Thackeray put the case against it more expansively and half ironically:

. . . One cannot but deplore the fate of the poor fellows who have been speculating upon the Art-Unions; and yet in the act of grief there is a lurking satisfaction. The poor fellows can’t sell their pieces; that is a pity. But why did the poor fellows paint such fiddle-faddle pictures? They catered for the bourgeois, the sly rogues! They know honest John Bull’s taste, and simple admiration of namby-pamby, and so they supplied him with an article that was just likely to suit him. In like manner savages are supplied with glass beads; children are accommodated with toys and trash, by dexterous speculators who know their market. Well, I am sorry that the painting speculators have had a stop put to their little venture, and that the ugly law against lotteries has stepped in and seized upon the twelve thousand pounds, which was to furnish many a hungry Raphael with a coat and a beefsteak. . . . [A] vast number of frame-makers will look wistfully at their carving and gilding as it returns after the exhibition to Mr. Tinto, Charlotte Street, along with poor Tinto’s picture from the Vicar of Wakefield that he made sure of selling to an Art-Union prizeman. . . . But . . . the enemies of Art-Unions have had some reason for their complaints, and I fear it is too true that the effect of those institutions, as far as they have gone hitherto, has not been mightily favourable to the cause of art. One day, by custom, no doubt, the public taste will grow better. . . .

In Scotland, meanwhile, the Art Union’s prototype flourished. The Association for the Promotion of the Fine Arts in Scotland (“Royal Association” after 1850, when it was chartered) had been founded in 1833 by David Octavius Hill, a painter who would achieve more lasting fame as one of the pioneers of photography. Though its membership was smaller than that of the London Art Union (728 in 1834, more than 6,000 in 1839) it seems to have attracted a superior class of subscribers, perhaps less interested in winning a prize than in furthering the cause of fine art. A witness before the select committee of Commons that met in 1846 to consider exempting the London Art Union from the lottery act stated that nearly all the 10,000 members then on its books were “of the lower middle classes.” The Scottish union, by contrast, was composed largely of solid members of the professional and business classes. Of the ninety-two winners in 1838, more than half were titled, landed, or professional men, or bankers. In Dundee, eighty of ninety-two identifiable members were from the wealthy and educated class.

In addition to distributing prizes and donating ten percent of the subscription money to the National Gallery of Scotland’s purchase fund for contemporary art (a form of patronage not practiced by the London Union), the Scottish union commissioned paintings to be included in a lengthy series of annual portfolios of engravings, beginning with John Faed’s illustrations to “Tam o’ Shanter.” One poem or novel was selected for each album, and it is no ground for surprise that nearly all the poems were by Burns and nearly all the novels were by Scott. This form of tribute to the two national literary heroes undoubtedly helps account for the swelling totals of recorded pictures from Burns and Scott. A few of

*During its long life (it was finally wound up in 1911), the Art Union distributed over half a million prints and spent half a million pounds in indirect patronage of the arts by way of the prizes earmarked for the purchase of paintings and other objects.
them were shown at the annual exhibitions, but most seem to have passed directly from the studio to the engraver’s shop.

The technical advances that made engravings more available, coinciding as they did with the broadening of the literate populace, had a similarly stimulating effect on the production of illustrated books.49 Here, on the level of everyday cultural commerce, the linkage between art and literature—the graphic design reflecting the verbal picture within the covers of a single book—was exploited afresh, *ut pictura poesis* being converted to a profitable fact of Victorian economic life. In the first issue of the *Illustrated London News* (14 May 1842), an extraordinarily florid prefatory address to the reader reviewed the progress of book illustration, of which the paper’s own debut served as a fresh inspirational landmark:

> It began in a few isolated volumes—stretched itself next over fields of natural history and science—penetrated the arcanae of our own general literature—and made companionship with our household books. At one plunge it was in the depth of the stream of poetry—working with its every current—partaking of the glow, and adding to the sparkles of the glorious waters—and so refreshing the very soul of genius, that even Shakspeare came to us clothed with a new beauty, while other kindred poets of our language seemed as it were to have put on festive garments to crown the marriage of their muses to the arts.

We saw in chapter 2 that illustrations in eighteenth-century literary works were largely confined to reprinted poetry, fiction, and essays. First editions of novels were not illustrated even in the first third of the nineteenth century—a particular irony in the case of Scott, the friend of such artists as Wilkie, Allan, and Haydon, whose novels would supply a livelihood to eventually scores of artists who made designs for subsequent editions or painted Scott subjects to hang on the walls. Only with the dazzling success in 1836–37 of *Pickwick Papers*, its monthly parts illustrated by Hablot K. Browne (“Phiz”), did publishers other than specialists in such confections as drawing room—table albums realize the commercial value of pictures accompanying the newly written text; and even so, the ordinary three-decker novel of the period continued to boast, by way of illustration, no more than an occasional frontispiece. But the part-issue of fiction in the Dickens manner, a practice later taking the form of magazine serialization, led readers to expect pictures along with the narrative.49 It was not accidental that the expanded use of illustrations in new books after *Pickwick* coincided with the spreading popularity of literary paintings. At the very least, illustrated books must have enlarged the market for the paintings that often portrayed the same literary subjects.

Nowhere in the art of the time was the effect of the engraving more pronounced than in portraits of women, especially literary heroines. The “Keepsake beauty,” indeed (a generic name whose origin will be made clear in a moment), was, by common agreement among all persons professionally interested in art except those who profited from her popularity, an offense against all judicious taste. Her cloyingly malign influence persisted from the late Regency almost to the end of the Victorian era; her person, as represented by countless paintings and drawings and the engravings that disseminated those images, was the quintessence of the age’s notorious sentimentality, in which the preceding century’s *sensibilité*, a prized affectation of the élite, was coarsened for, and by, the middle classes. It would not be too daring to suggest that pictures of her
were icons secularized for Protestant homes, hung and reproduced in places where, in Roman Catholic societies, images of the Madonna and female saints could be found. They were the most familiar visual manifestation of the Victorian cult of woman worship.

The Keepsake beauty’s lineage is clear enough, and to compare her with, for instance, Lely’s Windsor Beauties is to have a revealing measure of the changed condition of art, not to say the role of women, in English society between the late seventeenth century and the mid-nineteenth. Insofar as she purported to represent a literary character, she was the offspring of the fashionable ladies who had impersonated figures from religion, myth, allegory, and literature for Reynolds, Romney, and other artists. These fancy, or role-playing, portraits had faded from fashion when their chief practitioners had laid down their brushes. Only on a few occasions during the first third of the nineteenth century did paintings identified as Miss X in the role of Y appear in the exhibitions. One or two ladies posed as Una (1806, 1821) or as Ellen in The Lady of the Lake (1811, 1815), two sisters as Hermia and Helena in A Midsummer Night’s Dream (1806), and the Honorable Mrs. Norton, beauty, poet, and wit, as the lady in St. Swithin’s chair in Scott’s Waverley (1829). After 1830, there were virtually no pictures so styled; Millais’s painting of the Honorable Caroline Roche as Diana Vernon in Rob Roy (1880) was most anachronistic.

The theatrical counterparts of these impersonation pictures, however, continued in demand. Artists, no doubt encouraged by theater managers, competed to induce currently starring actresses to pose for them in their most popular roles. In 1816, a newspaper reported in authentic press-agent’s prose that “Miss [Eliza] O’Neill had no less than seven pressing solicitations from eminent painters to sit to them in her elegant and natural character of Lady Teazle, for the Royal Academy exhibition; but we understand that Sir T. Lawrence is likely to be the artist selected to give a graceful representation of this charming actress.” It appears that Sir Thomas lost his bid, if it was ever tendered. Miss O’Neill was, in fact, painted as Lady Teazle, but by an unknown artist. Her appearance that year at the Academy exhibition, as Juliet, was under the auspices of the lesser portraitist George Dawe.

Although such paintings testified to the continuing strength of the star system in the early nineteenth-century theater, there was a growing tendency to play down the identity of the model and to focus, instead, on the character she impersonated. Theatrical portraiture shaded into a new mutation of the fancy picture, the female portrait whose connection with, say, Shakespeare was confined to the name of the character and an appropriate quotation. The fact that the model was (or was not) an actress ceased to be an important consideration, and the role portrayed, far from remaining a distinctive link between the play and the picture, faded away also, being retained only in the name applied to the portrait and the presence of a readily identifiable attribute, such as a garland of flowers in the case of Ophelia or a shepherdess’ crook in that of Celia in As You Like It. Complaint was seldom made, though it should have been, that the lady’s costume, which usually was taken straight from the fashion books of the moment, and her hairdo, which ran to corkscrew curls when these were the vogue, diminished the authenticity of the impersonation.

These portraits were engraved for wide distribution, both separately and as illustrations in the coffee-table books of the period—insipid,
Although no one thought the less of Wordsworth, Tennyson, or Browning for having contributed a few poems to such books, the involvement of serious painters was sometimes held against them, not only by fellow artists but by their patrons. Mentioning William Boxall to W. P. Frith in a letter in 1843, the collector John Gibbons remarked, "When you talk of him, [Frank] Stone, etc., as the painters of 'mere prettiness,' you must be thinking of the things that they were fools enough to do for the 'annuals.' I daresay that both are heartily ashamed of themselves for it; indeed, I know that Boxall is . . . " (Frith, Autobiography, 3:203). On the other hand, John Martin, celebrated then as now for the extra-large canvases on which he portrayed equally huge events, found a bread-and-butter occupation contributing twenty-seven designs to various annuals between 1826 and 1837. They could hardly be accused of "mere prettiness," dealing as they did with such subjects as the Crucifixion, the repentance of Nineveh, the destruction of Babel, and Caius Marius mourning over the ruins of Carthage (Balston, John Martin, pp. 91–93; Feaver, The Art of John Martin, pp. 103, 110–12, 125).

They were explicitly meant to capitalize upon the sisterhood of the arts by juxtaposing engravings of a sentimental cast with texts from literature (stretching the term to its limits)—milk-and-water verse, vapid short stories, vignettes of false-elegant prose. Thackeray described them with devastating accuracy:

Take the standard "Album" for instance—that unfortunate collection of deformed Zuleikas and Medoras (from the "Byron Beauties"), the Flowers, Gems, Souvenirs, Caskets of Loveliness, Beauty, as they may be called; glaring caricatures of flowers, singly, in groups, in flower-pots, or with hideous deformed little Cupids sporting among them; of what are called "mezzotinto" pencil drawings, "poonah-paintings," and what not. "The Album" is to be found invariably upon the round rosewood brass-inlaid drawing-room table of the middle classes, and with a couple of "Annuals" besides, which flank it on the same table, represents the art of the house . . . .

He begged artists to "never more draw a single 'Forsaken One,' 'Rejected One,' 'Dejected One'"—the standard moods to be represented, along with the more abstract depiction of something called "soulfulness"—"at the entreaty of any publisher, or for the pages of any Book of Beauty, Royalty, or Loveliness whatever." Of course, no artist with publishing connections listened: like Thackeray himself, a failed painter turned journalist and art critic, all had their living to make. But unlike Thackeray, they could paint reasonably plausible faces of beautiful women.*

In one category of these female portraits and figure studies, the interest was simply that of the old Reynolds-Gainsborough picture, the flattering realization of fashionable, if not necessarily beautiful, women. The fictitious Galaxy Gallery of British Beauty in Bleak House, which contained an engraving of Lady Dedlock, had its real-life counterpart in such luxury items as The Court Album (1853–56).

Alongside the art-cum-text albums in the fashionable bookshops were displayed larger, costlier ones that were devoted entirely to engravings, with perhaps a brief literary quotation to help explain and add cultural tone to each plate. During their heyday from the 1820s to the late 1840s, these two related types of illustrated volumes for the carriage trade gave profitable employment to many artists and engravers. The latter type were often commissioned from artists and craftsmen by entrepreneurs, today's "book packagers," who would have the finished engravings bound up and then turned the product over to publisher-booksellers for retail distribution. Among the opulent volumes thus produced were several that illustrated the heroines of literature: Charles Heath's The Shakespeare Gallery: Containing the Principal Female Characters in the Plays of the Great Poet (1836–37) and The Heroines of Shakespeare (1848), with the same cast of forty-five characters but a different lineup of artists; A Gallery of Byron Beauties (1838?), the one Thackeray mentioned; The Waverley Gallery (1840); and The Beauties of Thomas Moore (1846).

Occasionally, the originals of the engravings would be displayed at the annual exhibitions either before or after the appearance of the albums they graced. Thus in 1833, at the British Institution (housed since its inception, suitably enough, in the former Boydell Shakespeare Gallery), William Boxall, the future director of the National Gallery, showed sever-
al of his designs that were engraved three years later for Heath's long-running Book of Beauty. As Graham Reynolds has observed, "Ephemera these Keepsake albums may be, but they embodied, even created, a standard of female beauty." Certainly they influenced, to an unwholesome extent, the way serious artists treated literary heroines, who seemed too often to come from the pages of a gift book rather than from the poetic text. Represented in such a manner, it could hardly be expected that the figures whom painters named after literary characters, except perhaps Tennyson's made-to-order ones (see Part Three, under Tennyson), would bear any resemblance to their namesakes. Whatever situation in a play or poem might be dimly implied in the model's expression or pose, or accessories such as an opened letter, a nosegay, or a slim volume turned face down before her, was sacrificed to the still more vague suggestion of a mood. But no matter what her image was meant to convey, if a literary name was bestowed on her, she was credible enough, and no further explanation was needed.

Although the fashion for Keepsake books themselves subsided toward the middle of the century, the incidence of such pictures in the exhibitions sharply increased. They became, in fact, one of the most oppressive clichés of this era of painting. A reviewer of the British Institution show of 1864 wearily remarked,

The beauty which blooms on these walls is of the complexion which years ago faded in the page of annuals, souvenirs, keepsakes, and scrapbooks. There is, it must be confessed, something too sickly sentimental and commonplace in this endless succession of damsels of pink or pallid cheeks, as the case may be, of soft rosy lips, of shoulders downy as velvet, tresses black as raven, and tortuous as Medusa's snakes—girls who, by their simpering smiles, would wish to win and flirt with every visitor in the gallery.

The next year, the Times's failure to locate any passage in The Rape of the Lock to justify Valentine Prinsep's calling his new picture Belinda stirred it to a shrill exasperation found in innumerable similar complaints in the sixties and seventies:

The sacque of flowered brocade, the Japan cabinet, and something of pout and pet in the face, seem rather to have suggested the title than Pope's poem to have suggested the picture. This is neither the nymph at the fatal moment when the lock was severed, "and flashed the living lightning from her eyes"; nor as Umbriel found her sunk in Thalestriss's arms, "her eyes dejected and her hair unbound"; nor as she flew raging to Sir Plume; nor in her beauteous grief, "her eyes half languishing, half drowned in tears," though nearer this point of the poem, perhaps, than any of the others.

But these snide remarks had little effect on the taste of the art-buying public. What less offensive subject could be hung on the wall of a churchgoing Victorian family's home, especially if the title it bore was from an approved work of English literature?

The staying power of the Keepsake-beauties branch of literary art was revealed once more toward the end of the century, when the Graphic, an illustrated weekly with a circulation running into hundreds of thousands, commissioned leading artists to paint a series of pretty faces of the kind generally popular with "the enormous public which sees illustrated papers." The resulting engravings found their way to the ends of the earth as free supplements to the paper. An African explorer reported that "when he once fell into the power of a savage African potentate, he
appeased the autocrat by daily presenting him with a 'Graphic' Type of Beauty, to adorn his tent; receiving in return one day a cow, another a goat, and so on." Besides proving that a touch of (nineteenth-century Caucasian, specifically English) female comeliness made the whole world kin, the effect on the Graphic's sales was such that the editor drew up a list of Shakespeare's heroines and allotted them to a similarly eminent panel of artists for the further expression of their ideals of womanly beauty. Some of the better-remembered contributors were Luke Fildes, who drew Jessica, Frederic Leighton (Desdemona), Edward Poynter (Cressida), Alma-Tadema (Portia, wife of Brutus), and Valentine Prinsep (Mariana). Their conceptions were published in the form of colored lithographs distributed with the paper and subsequently gathered in an album, and the original paintings were exhibited as a group in 1888 prior to being sold at Christie's. The album contained letterpress by William Ernest Henley, who was prevented by the publishers from specifying the scene each picture represented. "We think," said the Art Journal, "his share in the work would have been more interesting had he had access to the painters, and given us their ideas upon the subject." But it is probable that they did, in fact, have few ideas, or at best they would have had to supply them retrospectively; for as the Art Journal also said, "an artist of talent cannot conjure up his visions at will, or upon the spur of the moment say that such and such are the lineaments with which he would portray his Julia or his Cordelia; hence it is that one so often finds that the result is merely a dressing up in a new garb of the most attractive model obtainable at the moment."

Thus from their inception in the late 1820s as an ornament to the luxurious life of the drawing room to their final Victorian incarnation late in the era as a circulation-stimulant for an illustrated paper, engravings of young women exemplified the way in which artistic taste was standardized by the sheer repetition of subject and style. Nowhere was this more true than in the realm of literary illustration. Where romantic, or sentimentalized, women were concerned, and the customary situations in which their authors had placed them, an artist had an inventory of previous treatments to refer to, and, in view of the well-known popular preference for the familiar rather than the original, he had little choice but to paint one more version of the same tried-and-true subject.