CHAPTER 9


By no means all of the paintings that had some sort of literary allusion attached to them had anything to do with the content of the books to which the spectator was referred by the title or the accompanying motto. Many belonged to the popular class of Victorian art devoted to portraying what were then called "modern instances" (As You Like It, 2.7)—the genre studies and anecdotal scenes from contemporary life that were touched on in chapter 6.

In contemporary figural theory, which, as recent scholars have shown, had a marked influence on certain kinds of Victorian paintings, episodes in the Old Testament were interpreted as prefiguring New Testament truths, and incidents in Christ's life were seen to have foreshadowed modern events. In a similar manner, episodes in literature could be interpreted as exemplars of situations, whether commonplace or crucial, in everyday modern life. In effect, the literary allusions attached to paintings without actual literary content represented a loose kind of secular Victorian typology. The "modern instance" was a realization of the prefiguration found in, or inferred from, the literary text. (Pictures from English history, especially seventeenth-century subjects, similarly could be seen to have application to current political affairs.)

A typical rural scene, of a youth in a gleaning field looking covetously at a sleeping girl, exhausted by her labors on a warm afternoon, might be called Cymon and Iphigenia. Viewers acquainted with the literary source in Boccaccio and Dryden, in which the youth was the handsome but boorish son of a Cyprian nobleman, would have read the picture knowing that in the Decameron or the Fables, the youth is transformed by the equally high-born maiden's love and becomes a polished gallant. If one chose to do so, one could use the recollected moral of the literary story as a means by which to reinterpret the painting: what appeared to be the prelude to a
The relation between the "modern instance" and the literary prefiguration might not even be indicated by an explicit literary reference: it might, instead, be suggested by an iconographical resemblance. A prime example occurred in connection with the familiar humorous subject of a courtship conducted in the presence of a nominal chaperon who has dropped off to sleep. In Abraham Solomon's *First Class—The Meeting* (RA 1854), a young naval officer, riding on a train, beguiled a young woman, inferentially with tales of adventure, while her father dozed in a corner of their first-class compartment. One literary expression of this subject was the Duke of Milan's lines to Proteus in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (3.1. 24–25), illustrated, for example, in Alfred Elmore's painting (RA 1858):

"This love of theirs myself have often seen, / Haply when they have judged me fast asleep." Solomon's picture was criticized for allowing the father to abrogate his protective duty, and so, when he painted a second version (pl. 142), he awakened the old gentleman and moved him into the center of the composition, where he listened agog as the officer addressed his stories to him while his daughter, busily crocheting but no less attentive, sat in the corner.\(^2\) Now the tableau was brought into line with the equivalent scene described (not enacted) in *Othello* (1.3) in which Othello recounts the story of his soldier's life to Brabantio while Desdemona, going about her household tasks, listens enthralled. This was the subject of a number of Shakespearean paintings (see Part Two, below), from one of which, Charles West Cope's of 1855 (pl. 143), Solomon may have borrowed the composition of his revised version. The Shakespeare scenes, Elmore's and Cope's, thus represented literary prefigurations of the "modern instance" painted by Solomon.*

Literary allusion, in the form of either a title or a quotation, added resonance to a wide variety of paintings from contemporary life. Pictures of significantly empty chairs—a favorite sentimental subject; pictures of chairs vacated by Scott (Sir William Allan) and Dickens (Luke Fildes) were one expression of the national mourning that marked the death of celebrated authors—bore references to such chairs in Crabbe's *The Parish Register* and better-known poems. The canvases of Thomas Webster, the one major Victorian genre painter of contemporary subjects who seldom drew otherwise from literature, were sometimes equipped with mottoes. His pair at the Royal Academy in 1841, *The Joke* and *The Frown*, was accompanied by the familiar lines from Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village* describing the schoolmaster:

Well had the boding tremblers learn'd to trace  
The day's disasters in his morning face;  
Full well they laugh'd, with counterfeited glee;  
At all his jokes, for many a joke had he;  
Full well the busy whisper, circling round,  
Convey'd the dismal tidings when he frown'd.

In 1858, Henry Wallis's *The Stonebreaker*, depicting the lifeless body of a road worker, came to the Royal Academy with a lengthy quotation from Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*: "Hardly entreated, brother! For us was thy back so bent [etc., etc.] . . . thy body, like thy soul, was not to know freedom." Anecdotal paintings such as this, with at least a tinge of social concern, became more frequent in and after the 1860s; and artists continued to avail themselves of literary references, perhaps to make their disturbing message a bit more palatable and respectable. Briton Riviere's *The

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*The connection seems not to have been noticed by modern students of Victorian art, but Thackeray was aware of it, however subliminally. Conceivably fresh from seeing Solomon's first version at the Academy in 1854, and remembering Cope's picture at the previous year's exhibition, he wrote (*The Newcomes*, chap. 9), apropos of the skeletons of regretted intentions and deeds that most people conceal in their private closets: "Who, in showing his house to the closest and dearest, doesn't keep back the key to a closet or two? I think of some honest Othello pausing over this very sentence in a railroad carriage, and stealthily gazing at Desdemona opposite to him. . . ."
Abraham Solomon, *First Class: The Meeting* (after 1854) (Southampton Art Gallery). A young warrior, Othello's junior by some years, spellbinds a young lady (a modern Desdemona) and her father (Babantio) with tales of battle and adventure. The scene has been moved from Venice (pl. 143) to a Victorian railway carriage, but that is the only substantial difference.

*In most cases, the quotations attached to paintings had the effect the artist intended. Occasionally, however, the spectator may have been forgiven for missing the point. Holman Hunt's *The Hireling Shepherd*, a typical picture from contemporary life showing a pair of dallying lovers, was exhibited in 1852 with lines from Edgar's song in *King Lear* (3.6. 41-44): "Sleepest or wakest thou, jolly shepherd? / Thy sheep be in the corn; / And for one blast of thy minikin mouth / Thy sheep shall take no harm." Hunt later explained that he intended a commentary on "the type of muddle-headed pastors, who, instead of performing their services to their flock—which is in constant peril—discuss vain questions of no value to any human soul" (Timothy Hilton, *The Pre-Raphaelites* [London, 1970], p. 86). No one, looking at the picture itself, would have imagined that Hunt was making a Milton-like statement on the subject of ecclesiastical negligence (and Whistonian theology?). By contrast, he made the spectator's comprehension of his purpose triply sure when he exhibited *The Awakening Conscience* the next year: it came equipped with no fewer than three biblical quotations, two in the catalogue and a third on the frame.

Poacher's Widow (RA 1879), showing "a young woman in black sunk in troubled sleep or absorbed in heartbroken thought on a copse bank, while in and out of the wood about her the pheasants and hares and rabbits, which have cost her husband his life, frisk and feed in the gloaming," bore explanatory lines from a ballad in Charles Kingsley's novel *Yeast*: "She thought of the dark plantation, / And the hares and her husband's blood." Five years earlier, a more conspicuous landmark in the progress of social realism, Luke Fildes's *Applicants for Admission to a Casual Ward*, had been hung at the Royal Academy with a more vehement quotation from a letter of Dickens: "Dumb, wet, silent horrors! Sphinxes set up against the dead wall and none likely to be at the pains of solving them until the general overthrow." Attacking the picture's sordidness, the *Saturday Review* declared that Fildes's citation of Dickens was no mitigation of his offense, "inasmuch as it has for obvious reasons always been held that in written description a place may be found for horrors which become intolerable when brought into pictorial form bodily before the eye."*¹*

The Victorians' awesome penchant for turning literary references to humorous account, which can be seen lavishly if dismally displayed in any random volume of *Punch*, relied heavily on the titles of Shakespeare's plays and quotations from them, which were so available a part of the middle-class Englishman's everyday vocabulary. Pictures of *The Taming of the Shrew*, far from depicting Catherine and Petruchio, might turn out to be genial, perhaps facetious representations of the subjection of women in marital life, or, for that matter, in the animal kingdom. In 1861, Landseer exhibited *The Shrew Tamed*, which depicted a pretty equestrienne leaning in triumph against a sweat-lathered, fiery-eyed horse she has succeeded in mastering. The model was said to have been a well-known young horsewoman named Miss Gilbert, but knowledgeable men about town who happened into the exhibition would have recognized "Skittles," the most celebrated of all mid-Victorian courtesans, who was often to be seen riding in Hyde Park. ("Horsebreaker" was current slang for high-class prostitute.)⁵ A painting of *Romeo and Juliet* (RA 1882) featured two
cats, one on top of a wall, the other looking up at it. At the Society of British Artists in 1841 was seen a picture titled *A Day's Pleasure*, equipped with lines from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, “—the reckoning, when the banquet's o'er— / The dreadful reckoning, when men smile no more.” The scene was the Star and Garter inn at Richmond, where half a dozen tipsy revelers from London were haggling with a waiter over the bill.

But what may well have been the nadir of this kind of foolery (though the choice is difficult) was reached in 1873, when a painting at the Royal Academy was catalogued with the quotation, “If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well it were done quickly.” Any commonsensical expectation that the scene was from *Macbeth* was quickly dispelled. What the spectators saw, according to a reviewer, was a monkey “hopping by slow degrees towards a biscuit, the property of a large dog lying down and watching his movements. The mingled expressions of courage, covetousness and fear in the face of the monkey, and of lazy interest and astonishment in that of the dog, are given with force and skill.”

Innumerable pictures that were nothing more than routine treatments of banal themes were decorated with titles or quotations that related them to a favorite work of literature. Pictures titled *The Rivals* were as likely to be sentimental genre pictures of two bucolic suitors competing for one woman, or two women in envious contention, as illustrations of Sheridan’s play, and many paintings called *The Cotter's Saturday Night*, or taking off from lines in Burns’s poem, landed at a great distance from it. Thomas Faed’s *His Only Pair* (RA 1860), for instance, bearing the motto “The mother, wi' her needle and her shears, / Gars auld claes look amaist as well's the new,” was pure sentimental genre, adequately described by a reviewer: “The little owner, divested of his extreme garments, is seated on a dresser, amused by an orange, while his industrious and frugal parent is making the necessary emendations. This picture will produce many a smile of pleasure and admiration.” Perhaps; but it was no more a picture of a humble family living in a cottage than was Alexander John-
"Once in a while, the transformation was effected in good faith. Early in his career, Leslie painted "a female figure with a moonlight effect" that he intended to be a Juliet but, he said, "not thinking when it was finished that it expressed her character, I gave it another name"—he did not reveal what. In Bulwer-Lytton's novel What Will He Do With It? (1859), the painter Vance paid the heroine three pounds to pose for a female head that he subsequently used for a series of portraits—"variations," as they say in music—entitled Toliana, Beatrice Cenci, Minna [Troil], Burn's Mary in Heaven, and Sabrina Fair, from Comus (bk. 6, chap. 1).

The subjects of entire tableaux also were convertible. Charles Allston Collins's well-known Convent Thoughts (RA 1851) began as an illustration of Shelley's Lady in "The Sensitive Plant," "the wonder of her kind." But when he became a High Churchman, Collins also converted the girl into a nun and replaced the contemplated lines from the atheistical Shelley with mottoes from Psalm 143, "I meditate on all thy works," and A Midsummer Night's Dream, 1.1 ("Thrice blessed they that master so their blood / To undergo such maiden pilgrimage"). Some years later, Arthur Hughes submitted to the Royal Academy a picture of Orlando in the forest of Arden carving Rosalind's name on a tree trunk. It was rejected, whereupon Hughes painted out Orlando, substituted "Amy" (from Tennyson's "Locksley Hall") on the tree, and turned the picture into a portrayal of a poor curate unable to marry the girl to whom he has been engaged for many years. Bearing a quotation from Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde, "For how myghte evere swetnesse han ben knowe / To him that nevere tasted bitterness?", it was accepted for the Academy's 1859 show.

When artists played so fast and loose with literary subject matter and allusions, it was no wonder that reviewers complained from time to time—and this was not a mere bid for a cheap laugh—that they could find no connection between the literary title of a painting and its content, or that the title had been adopted to make intelligible what was otherwise a meaningless scene. Critics' exasperation with what they deemed the misleading or inadequate labeling of so-called literary pictures sharpened, or at least was more often voiced, after mid-century, when "illustrated anecdotes" with contrived literary tie-ins had developed into a major nuisance.
"Dealers only can tell us where they will be forty years hence, when the catalogue is lost and the name of the picture is forgotten," said the Athenaum of one such picture—Bruce in His Adversity, allegedly from Scott—in 1857.12

The fact was that artists too often used literary allusion to lend specious value to what was undeniably bad art. "It is melancholy," said the Saturday Review in 1874, "to see how... Shakespeare and the best authors of all countries are made to pass off the worst of pictorial wares."13 A prototypical example was a picture, shown by George Boughton at that year's Academy, which seems to have been the quintessence of Victorian popular art, plein air division. Evidently it had all the ingredients: "an open bit of country, with a quiet, quaint, old town beyond a white road; a holy well and cross and village maids," said one critic,14 to which another added, "Several of the characters, forsaking the beaten path, betake themselves to the springtide meadows; the liquid air and the budding trees are of the vernal time which the poet loved so well... In the foreground a pretty girl offers a draught of water to a youth whose weary journey seems likely to end in a pilgrimage of love."15 It comes as no surprise that the painting was entitled God Speed! Pilgrims Setting Out for Canterbury; Time of Chaucer.

"I am not a poetically minded man," Samuel Butler, the author of Erewhon and The Way of All Flesh, once remarked. "... I have never read and never, I am afraid, shall read a line of Keats or Shelley or Coleridge or Wordsworth except such extracts as I occasionally see in Royal Academy Catalogues."16 To which a writer on Scott and the visual arts has added, "Had Butler lived in Edinburgh he could have read quite extensively in Scott in the catalogues of the Royal Scottish Academy."17

The examples offered above of quotations used for various purposes, from the gravely didactic to the grievously humorous, represent what was, in fact, an important and revealing practice in the nineteenth-century art world. Exhibition catalogues were little ad hoc anthologies of elegant extracts. Charles Eastlake told the Royal Commissioners sponsoring the Westminster cartoon exhibition in 1845 that "the Catalogues in the hands of so many thousands would be the first introduction of many to an acquaintance with our best poets and writers."18 And so the quotation-filled art catalogue may have contributed, however modestly, to the literary culture of the class it served.

But of course it served primarily as a guide book. From the painter's point of view, an apt quotation could be a ready-made alternative to writing his own prose description of a picture. Each such catalogue entry was a minuscule counterpart of the descriptive brochures that artists like Haydon and Martin provided at exhibitions of their huge, crowded canvases. Painters also used it, like the incidental printed ballads, broadsides, sheet music, newspapers, posters, and engravings that Hogarth and Victorian narrative artists such as Ford Madox Brown (Work) occasionally placed in their compositions, to point the picture's moral or enlarge its message. (This indication that painters could not always depend on their pictures to be self-explanatory without clues inside the scene or in the motto says something about the interpretive capacity of their clientele.) Finally, the well-chosen poetic quotation provided a means of cultivating, indeed directing, the spectator's sympathetic response to the picture, supplying mood music, so to speak, as a background for the visual experi-
ence. The hope was that under the joint auspices of the theory of the sisterhood of the arts and associationist psychology the text and the picture would merge into a single entity.

The custom of physically relating a painting with a pertinent text pre-dated associationism. Mottoes, “haunting and now inexplicably relevant as a refrain” as David Piper has written, were inscribed on miniatures and sometimes on large portraits in Elizabethan days; at Longleat, for example, hangs a portrait of Lord Thomas Seymour of Sudeley that contains, on the left side, eight lines from Sir John Harington’s Orlando. In Hogarth’s time, writing verses to accompany engravings, at half a crown per quatrain, was among the casual jobs that kept Grub Street hacks from sinking below the subsistence level. Hogarth himself patronized somewhat more reputable sources: the verses for The Rake’s Progress and The Four Stages of Cruelty were written, respectively, by Dr. John Hoadly and the Reverend James Townley, both of whom were schoolmasters and dramatists prominent enough in the literary life of their period to win notice in the Dictionary of National Biography. The Distressed Poet bore a quotation from Pope’s The Dunciad.

A fragment of a quotation was printed in the catalogue of the second exhibition ever held in London, that of the Society of Artists in 1761: The Bard, from Mr. Gray’s Ode. “But oh! what glorious scenes, &c.” Thirty years later, at the very moment that Archibald Alison, in his influential treatise on associationist psychology, Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste (1790), was extolling the emotional value of remembered poetry when one took in a natural vista, the catalogue sold at the door of the Boydell Shakespeare Gallery contained generous quotations, sometimes as long as two or three printed pages, from the scenes the pictures illustrated. Subsequently, the catalogue of Fuseli’s Milton Gallery followed the same practice, evidently out of practical necessity. A “coarse-looking” man who had probably wandered into the show by mistake and who, in any event, had not laid out sixpence for a catalogue, went up to Fuseli and asked, “Pray, Sir, what is that picture?” Instead of referring him to the guidebook, the artist obligingly answered, “It is the bridging of Chaos: the subject from Milton.” “No wonder I did not know it,” said the man, “for I never read Milton, but I will.” “I advise you not,” replied Fuseli, “for you will find it a d—d tough job.”

Academic doctrine was strongly against this concession to the indifferently educated. Only a few years after this encounter, Fuseli stated the principle in an Academy lecture:

The first demand on every work of art is that it constitute one whole, that it fully pronounce its own meaning, that it tell itself; it ought to be independent; the essential part of its subject ought to be comprehended and understood without collateral assistance, without borrowing its commentary from the historian or the poet; for as we are soon wearied with a poem whose fable and motives reach us only by the borrowed light of annexed notes, so we turn our eye discontented from a picture or a statue whose meaning depends on the charity of a Cicerone, or must be fetched from a book.

“I advised a painter the other day,” Fuseli’s fellow academician Northcote told the painter James Ward, “never to explain by words what his picture is intended to represent; I told him to endeavour by every means to find out [i.e., produce] the effect on the spectator without giving any verbal explanation. If you can talk well, persons will fancy they see in a picture what in reality has been produced by your tongue”—or, he might have
added, your transcribing pen alongside an open book of poetry. But, as Ward replied, such wisdom was increasingly unheeded: "The practice of many painters of the present day is very different from what you recommend. When they exhibit their pictures to the public, they give a long descriptive account, and, not content with what prose can do for them, they introduce long quotations from the poets."22

This was one evidence of the age's addiction to capsulized beauty and truth, an enthusiasm to which, as we have seen (see chapter 5, above), the many collections of gems from the great authors catered.23 From the schoolmaster's insistence on the moral and psychological benefits of memorizing passages of poetry to Matthew Arnold's magisterial doctrine that the ultimate worth of any given poem could be determined by applying the litmus test ("touchstone") of a few top-quality verses from Shakespeare or Milton, the literary temper of the time prized the small but supposedly exquisite, as well as sage, fragment: infinite riches in a couple of lines.*

The mottoes on pictures were simply the most cultivated manifestations of a phenomenon met everywhere in Victorian England: space-fillers in newspapers and cheap magazines, greeting cards, children's party crackers, "sentiments" printed, or meant to be written, in remembrance albums; scriptural texts quoted at the beginning of sermons, carved in stone or painted on the walls of churches and chapels; samplers in parlors, and framed biblical verses and prudential aphorisms on the walls of business offices, prisons, workhouses, hospitals, and orphanages. There was hardly a line in these droplets of evocation, sentiment, humor, or wisdom that did not find its way, sooner or later, into the exhibition catalogues.

In books, the equivalent of the picture motto was the printed epigraph on the title page or at the beginning of each chapter, or, as with Tennyson and others, at the head of a poem, to enrich a sentiment, express a moral, or serve as a thematic signpost. Several of the writers familiar to gallerygoers in the first half of the nineteenth century were notable users of such mottoes.24 Crabbe prefaced each letter in The Borough with quotations from classical authors, Shakespeare, and other English poets. Ann Radcliffe, in The Italian and The Mysteries of Udolpho, drew upon Shakespeare, Milton, Collins, Thomson, Walpole (The Mysterious Mother), Mason (Caractacus and Elfride), Goldsmith, Gray, and Beattie. By far the most persistent borrower of epigraphs was Scott, who headed 202 chapters in his novels with quotations from Shakespeare and 386 more from twenty-six other poets.25 After Scott, numerous novelists, including Mrs. Gaskell but not Dickens or Thackeray, prefixed quotations to their chapters. For the chapter headings in her last three novels, Felix Holt, Middlemarch, and Daniel Deronda, George Eliot composed ninety-six herself, taking the rest (a larger number) from Shakespeare (thirty-one), Wordsworth (nine), Chaucer (four), Sir Thomas Browne (three), and a wide variety of other sources, English and non-English.26

Turner was the first painter to employ poetic quotations as a regular practice. In his very first years as an exhibitor at the Royal Academy (1798–1800), his oil and watercolor pictures were listed with extracts from Milton, Thomson, Gray, Mallet, and Langhorne. Later pictures bore quotations from Southey, Scott, Byron, and Rogers. All told, 53 of the 200 oil paintings he exhibited across the entire span of his career were so embellished.27 Turner did not always quote accurately; the line that

*The omnipresence of those fragments of poetry, from art exhibition catalogues to collections of elegant extracts, must have had a marked though unacknowledged effect on contemporary thinking about literature, posing (among other things) the question of how parts related to the whole. In a notebook entry for 12 May 1865, Gerard Manley Hopkins recorded thoughts on the matter:

Sometimes . . . one does imagine a quotation to be a whole when it is only a part. The effect is curious. . . . I have noticed sometimes this effect with regard to those quotations and tags of poetry and so on one sees added to the titles of pictures in the catalogue of the Academy. Suppose one saw this stanza of Shelley's chosen—

Music when sweet voices die
Vibrates in the memory
Odours when sweet violets sicken
Live within the sense they quicken.

Now if one imagined this stanza was a single thought and the whole poem, or what, though opposite to that, would in another way be as bad, four lines namely out of some piece in the metre of his lines written among the Euganean hills, how greatly would the effect lose, unless I am mistaken, of that beauty it has when you add the next stanza—

Rose-leaves, when the rose is shed,
Are heap'd for the beloved's bed
And so thy thought when thou art gone
Love himself shall slumber on.

You then know the poem is complete in these two stanzas. (The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins, ed. Humphry House and Graham Storey [London, 1959], p. 98.)
When he painted his *Haidee: A Greek Girl* (pl. 57), Charles Eastlake wrote a friend, "I would rather have found a quotation from a more respectable poem than 'Don Juan,' but it suits the picture so perfectly that it would be impossible to come nearer its impression;" but he did, in fact, alter the line in the quotation from *Don Juan* (canto 2, stanza 118), "... her cheek's pure dye / Like twilight rosy still with the set sun," changing "rosy" to "glowing" as being more suitable for the picture as completed (Memoir of Eastlake, compiled by Lady Eastlake, in his Contributions to the Literature of the Fine Arts, 2d ser. [London, 1870], p. 115).

It was at this same exhibition (1844) that W. P. Frith saw the Duke of Wellington standing before Turner's *Rain, Steam and Speed*: "I watched the Duke's puzzled expression as he read the quotation from the 'Fallacies of Hope.' He then looked steadily at the picture, and with a muttered 'Ah! poetry!' walked on" (Frith, Autobiography, 1:120). The point of the story is not much diminished by the fact that *Rain, Steam and Speed* was exhibited without a quotation.

The following year, Thackeray contributed to Fraser's Magazine a review article in which he called the *Fallacies* "that syllibine book of mystic rhymes," adding, "... Turner is a great and awful mystery to me. I don't like to contemplate him too much, lest I should actually begin to believe in his poetry as well as his paintings, and fancy the *Fallacies of Hope* to be one of the finest poems in the world." Before the essay appeared in the June Fraser's, Thackeray also paid his respects to Turner in Punch (31 May), in the form of a poem supposedly composed by the artist to accompany his *Morning—Returning from the Ball, St. Marino*, which actually had one more *Fallacies* tag appended to it:

Oh! what a scene!—Can this be Venice? No.
And yet methinks it is—because I see
Amid the lumps of yellow, red and blue,
Something which looks like a Venetian spire.
That dash of orange in the back-ground there
Bespeaks 'tis Morning! And that little boat
(Almost the colour of tomatasauce,)
Proclaims them now returning from the ball!
This in my picture I would fain convey,
I hope I do. Alas! what FALLACY!

Recent students of Turner have taken the *Fallacies of Hope* fragments somewhat more seriously. Graham Reynolds points out that, like the quotations the artist took from published poems, his own verses reflected his “anxiety to find parallels between literature and his own paintings.” Peter Conrad, arguing that “the image is a bland surface which can only acquire an interior by attachment to a literary context,” instances Turner’s use of the fragments to turn the images into dramatic gestures, speeches of stoic defiance or sententious contempt. The image acquires a voice, the painting becomes a soliloquy. For instance, the note to “Slaves Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying—Typhon Coming on.”

> Before it sweeps your decks, throw overboard
> The dead and dying—ne'er heed their chains.
> Hope, Hope, fallacious Hope!
> Where is thy market now?

with its nautical swagger and its swift change from the slave-trader’s brutality to the professional fatalism of the old tar, makes the picture strike an attitude, turns it into a rudimentary dramatic monologue. Quotation supplies the absence of human characters, and makes the landscapes a continuing commentary on tragic nature.

So quotations could, on occasion, be used for purposes more fundamental, and more integral to the painting, than mere embellishment or the arousal of a momentary association.

Constable too exhibited a few landscapes with appended snatches from Thomson, including *Hadleigh Castle* (1829) and *View of Salisbury Plain from the Meadows* (1831). In the letterpress of a volume of engravings from his paintings that he published in 1833 under the title *Various Subjects of Landscape, Characteristic of English Scenery*, he quoted Thomson (most frequently), Wordsworth, Milton, Crabbe, Burns, and Falconer. Less famous but prolific landscapists like Thomas Cooper—scores of them, in fact—added a verbal flourish to the effect of their graphic imagery. They thus completed the process, begun by Claude Lorrain, Salvator Rosa, Poussin, and Wilson without such extraneous aid, of stimulating and guiding the individual person’s response to Nature. People now looked at actual landscapes with eyes and minds freshly sensitized by Wordsworth and his fellow poets, and in due course by Ruskin; sometimes, in obedience to Alison’s associationism, they even took volumes of poetry with them on their excursions in search of the sublime or the picturesque. Thanks to the poetic fragments in the exhibition catalogues, they could have the same experience indoors. As they “art-walked”—perhaps with one of their party reading the catalogue entries aloud—the quotations could heighten the emotions initiated by the paintings themselves.

It is likely that the growing use of poetic quotations had something to do with the emergence early in the nineteenth century of the so-called ideal painting, which took a mere hint from a line or two of a poetic text and developed what artist and critic alike took to be its quintessential spirit, irrespective of any literal detail. Wheatley and other popular engraved

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*Kenneth Clark has observed that the quotation from *The Seasons* (beginning “Meantime refracted from yon eastern cloud”) that Turner tacked onto his *Butter-mere with a Rainbow* (1797–98) “specifically anticipates the theories of impressionism,” as some others also reflected his preoccupation with the effects of light and atmosphere (*Landscape into Art*, rev. ed. [London, 1976], p. 189).*
Charles W. Cope, L’Allegro and Il Penseroso (both RA 1848) (Victoria & Albert Museum, Crown Copyright). Cope, who exhibited at the Royal Academy for forty-nine years, was prominent among the artists who supplied the mid-century demand for "ideal pictures" in the form of allegorical figures suggested by Milton’s companion poems.

Illustrators had often departed from the scene nominally being represented for the sake of adding graphic poetry to the language on the printed page. By the 1820s and 1830s, artists like Etty, Hilton, and Dadd were adopting a line or two from Milton (Comus, “L’Allegro,” and “Il Penseroso”) or—especially—“Come unto these yellow sands” (Ariel’s song in The Tempest, 1.2) and developing independent compositions such as a Rubensesque circle of dancing nymths; or, what is more likely, painting their pictures first and then adding the poetic inscription. No one would have associated designs like these with poetry without the aid of a title or quotation, although echoes of Titian or Poussin would have been audible.

Quotations were freely applied to a wide variety of pictures—genre and landscape most of all, but also animal paintings, figure studies, scenes of the Middle East, Spain, and every other exotic locale—in fact, almost every category but portraits and sporting pictures. A floral painting at the Royal Academy in 1837, for example, was embellished with a quotation from “Lycidas”: and Wilkie’s Grace Before Meat (RA 1839), a typical genre scene, was shown with a quotation from a manuscript poem by the Countess of Blessington:
A lowly cot where social board is spread,
The simple owner seated at its head;
His bonnet lifts and doth to Heaven appeal,
To grant a blessing on the humble meal!

Probably no more than half of the mottoes in the catalogues were attributed. Some of them represented a level of versifying no higher than Valentine greetings or inscriptions on bonbon boxes. To identify all the unattributed ones would be a task beyond the aid of the largest existing batteries of concordances and dictionaries of quotations, and indeed rendered hopeless by the fact that some artists, not Turner alone, wrote their own *ad hoc* verses. (So had Scott. The many epigraphs in his romances attributed to "Old Play," "Old Ballad," and "Anonymous" were from his own pen; and it is said that a number of ascriptions to Byron, Dr. Johnson, Beaumont, Donne, Prior, Herbert, and Pope also conceal his hand.) As a young man, William Quiller Orchardson exhibited at the Royal Scottish Academy a picture called *Marley Gray*, accompanied by a two-quatrain quotation from a ballad in the Scots dialect. A collector of old Scottish literature told the artist he had never seen it. "I just made the two verses myself to suit the picture," Orchardson said.

Many of the genuine unlocated excerpts may have come from eighteenth-century poetasters who lingered in literary recollection as late as the first Victorian years. Among the identifiable tags most often used were two from Gray's "Elegy," "The ploughman homeward plods his weary way" and "Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight"; two from Byron, "Ave Maria! 'Tis the hour" (*Don Juan*, canto 3, stanza 103) and "The moon is up and yet it is not night" (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, canto 4, stanza 27); and, after the 1850s, "How happy I could be with either / Were 'tother dear Charmer away!", a couplet from Macheath's song in *The Beggar's Opera* that was considered just the thing to attach to paintings of humorously romantic dilemmas.

In a sample of about 1,400 identified quotations, most of them accompanying pictures in the Victorian era, Shakespeare and Tennyson led the list, with some 130 each. Thomson was in third place with about 100, and at some distance behind him were Byron, Burns, and Scott, represented

146. Henry J. Townsend, *Ariel* (RA 1845) (Royal Collection, Copyright Reserved). Although the announced subject is the sprite in *The Tempest*, the accompanying quotation from Byron ("The moon is up, and yet it is not night") reduces the picture's specificity. It is not so much an illustration of Shakespeare as an ideal picture that uses *The Tempest* merely as a point of departure.
by a range of 60 to 80 paintings each. In the third category were Moore,
Rogers, Milton, and Gray, bunched quite close together. After these top
ten, there was a decided gap in incidence. Among the pre-eighteenth­
century poets represented by a few quotations were Fletcher, Herbert,
Jonson, and Waller. The eighteenth century contributed Collins (the
leader, with more than a dozen pictures), Shenstone (with 7, one as late as
1878), Addison, Akenside, Beattie, Falconer, Young, and Erasmus Dar­
win, from whose The Botanic Garden an exhibitor at the Society of British
Artists in 1834 drew the motto for his picture: "Now o'er their heads the
whizzing whirlwinds breathe, / And the live desert pants and heaves be­
neath." Perhaps something could be said for The Fallacies of Hope, after all.
Pictures painted in the first third of the nineteenth century and later had
tags from such poets as Campbell (22), Hood (16), Clare, Montgomery,
Leigh Hunt, and Kirke White. The gift book set was represented by
Felicia Hemans (12), Laetitia Landon, Adelaide Procter, Eliza Cook, Jean
Ingelow, and Mrs. Norton. Such names are sufficiently dim today; and
even more lost in oblivion are those of Swain, Bowles, Hervey, and (but
for his fortuitous connection with Dr. Johnson) the forger-cleric Dr.
Dodd.

Once in a while, painters indulged in what today might be called dou­
ble-dipping: taking their subject (or title) from one literary source and
then adorning the picture with a tag from another. The practice was
similar to that employed by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Shake­
speare editors, of "illustrating" (elucidating) expressions by citing related
lines in the works of other dramatists or poets. Artists seem to have meant
to clarify or enhance the subject of the painting by "illustrating" it in that
sense. Thus Henry Singleton's The Taming of the Shrew (RA 1804) quoted
the Tatler (No. 231), and Mulready's scene from Scott's St. Ronan's Well,
Mr. Peregrine Touchwood Breaking in upon the Rev. Josiah Cargill (RA 1832)
bore an epigraph from Butler's Hudibras. Frith's A Stage-Coach Adventure
(RA 1848) was based on an incident in Smollett's Roderick Random, but its
motto was from Macbeth: "What! a soldier, and afeard?" A few years later
(BI 1854), a figure painting illustrating a line from Moore's Irish Melodies,
"Rich and rare were the gems she wore," was exhibited under the Keat­
sian title "A thing of beauty is a joy forever." To these dual references,
critics once in a while chipped in a third for good measure. In 1860,
Abraham Solomon showed a picture of a group of homeward bound
revelers on Waterloo Bridge coming upon the body of a drowned woman
just taken from the river. Although the picture was untitled, the subject,
insofar as it had any literary relation, obviously was from Hood's poem
"The Bridge of Sighs." Solomon, however, quoted King Lear: "The gods
are just, and of our pleasant vices / Make instruments to scourge us." At
least one critic saw, as well, "poor Ophelia."40

Such literary echoes as these, if legitimate and properly managed,
could be effective enough. But though the assumption was that a quota­
tion would harmonize with the picture, in practice this was by no means
always true, especially if the literary context was remembered. Recent
critics have pointed out that several of the poetic extracts Constable used
were simply at odds with the scene depicted. The lines from Thomson's
"Summer" that accompanied his Landscape: Noon (1827) describe "the
fresher breezes of evening, not the hour of noon."41

The quotation was a double-edged tool: it could either amplify the
painting or distort, even contradict, the artist's intention. Reviewers
sometimes called attention to this discrepancy. They also suggested, only
half facetiously, that some pictures, like the “convertible” ones mentioned
in the first section of this chapter, were so loosely connected with the letter
and spirit of their alleged literary source that the addition of a quotation
from another could transform their meaning. When F. R. Pickersgill
exhibited his allegorical scene from *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, *Christian Con­
ducted by Charity, Prudence, Piety, and Discretion into the Valley of Humiliation*
(RA 1855)—a canvas filled with “knights, ladies, and attendants”—the
*Athenaeum* remarked that it “would do for Spenser, if a quotation were
attached to it. The Virtues pirouette and waltz round Christian, who
bears it with becoming patience.” 42

Often, especially in mid-Victorian times, the quotation leaped from the
catalogue to the frame of the picture itself. At today’s Tate Gallery alone,
Ford Madox Brown’s *Lear and Cordelia* has a number of lines from *King
Lear* inscribed in the upper corners of the frame, Arthur Hughes’s *The
Eve of St. Agnes* nine lines from Keats’s poem, and Hunt’s *Claudio and
Isabella* two lines of dialogue from *Measure for Measure*. Pictures in other
public galleries, such as Hughes’s *Ophelia* and *Enid and Geraint*, Brown’s
*The Death of Sir Tristram*, Hunt’s *Valentine and Sylvia*, and Frank Dicksee’s
*Juliet on the Balcony*, bear similar quotations from their respective sources.
This practice, apart from putting the literary source into the closest possi­
ble juxtaposition with the painted illustration, recommended itself to
artists’ patrons who wanted the greatest value for their money. Contemporary frames were so ornate that they were a notorious example of
conspicuous expenditure; Thackeray once described a room hung with
“richly carved gilt frames (with pictures in them).” 43 The frame was the
equivalent of an ostentatiously luxurious book binding. When, in addi­
tion to lavish hand carving and heavy gilt, a quotation from Shakespeare
was thrown in, the buyer felt, with some justification, that he was getting
his money’s worth.

Unless the quotation was inscribed on the frame, or the purchaser of
the painting snipped it from the catalogue and pasted it on the back, the
association of picture and motto was severed when the picture was re­
moved from the exhibition. But the association would be resumed if the
painting subsequently were engraved and the motto placed at the bottom
of the print, a circumstance the artist may well have had in mind when he
chose the quotation in the first place.

Attractive though the custom of hanging mottoes on pictures undoubt­
edly was, it never lacked for critics, whose occupational wit it encouraged,
as we have seen. Hazlitt seized the opportunity presented by a painting at
the British Institution in 1815 to verbally slash both the picture and the
source of the quotation: “We could neither understand this picture nor
the lines from Lord Byron’s *Corsair*, which are intended to explain the
subject of it.” 44 Whatever reasons may have been urged against the game
of tags, painters continued to play it, and reviewers grew steadily more
vigorous in their condemnation:

This practice, we may observe [said a writer in *Fraser’s Magazine* in 1860], is
becoming an absolute nuisance. If a picture cannot be understood without
some such clumsy aid, the wall of the Royal Academy is hardly the proper
place for it. If it can, why should a quantity of superfluous prose or poetry be printed
merely to afford the catalogue carrier of each party an opportunity of devolv­
ing his rounded periods as he reads the passage aloud, which he always does in
extenso, to the infinite comfort of those bystanders who have read or don’t want
to read it.” 45
Sixty years after Fuseli asserted the autonomy of the picture enclosed in a frame, at least a few artists still subscribed to the principle. In 1866, the historical genre painter Henry Nelson O'Neil declared in a lecture, "It has been often said that the powers of Art commence where those of language cease; and certainly, if a picture requires any extraneous aid to make its meaning intelligible, it proves that the artist has chosen a subject which is either beyond his power, or else scarcely fitted for pictorial illustration."

If paintings could be equipped with poetry, there was no reason why traffic should not also go the opposite direction, the pictures inspiring poems that in effect served as post hoc mottoes. Some years before Leigh Hunt proposed a gallery of pictures from *The Faerie Queene* to be painted posthumously by a large company of Old Masters (see Part Three, below, under Spenser), Laetitia Elizabeth Landon, a versifier closely identified with the gift-book industry, published in her volume *The Troubadour: Catalogue of Pictures and Historical Sketches* (1825) a series of effusions, "Poetical Sketches of Modern Painters." These were poems inspired by a number of currently exhibited paintings, among them Henry Thomson's *Juliet after the Masquerade* (pl. 147), Stothard's *The Fairy Queen Sleeping* (RA 1825), and Henry Howard's *Fairies on the Sea Shore* (Iris and Her Train) (B1 1824). Ten years later, the leading poem in L.E.L.'s volume *The Vow of the Peacock, and Other Poems* was a narrative suggested by Maclise's painting of that name at the Royal Academy—a token of appreciation, no doubt, for the artist's portrait of the poet that was exhibited there in 1830.

On her unpretentious literary plane, Landon's efforts were a symptom of the revival of the old tradition of "iconic poetry"—poems inspired by particular works of art. Southey wrote a poem on a landscape of Poussin, and Lamb wrote one on Leonardo da Vinci's *The Virgin of the Rocks*. Coleridge's "The Garden of Boccaccio" was composed to accompany a plate by Stothard in the *Keepsake* for 1829. Keats, who as Ian Jack has shown was powerfully affected by all the kinds of art available to a young Londoner in the early years of the century, assimilated his memories of classic vases, seen in collections and engravings, in his "Ode on a Grecian Urn."

But it was Wordsworth who most often, among the Romantics, reaffirmed this aspect of the sisterhood of the arts. At various times, he composed poems on Yorkshire landscapes by Richard Westall's brother William, Haydon's often-repeated pictures of Napoleon on St. Helena and Wellington at Waterloo, a painting of Endymion by Luca Giordano that hung on the stairway at Rydal Mount, Raphael's picture of John the Baptist, and Leonardo's *The Last Supper*. None of these occasional poems represents Wordsworth at his most inspired, but his "Elegiac Stanzas Suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle, in a Storm, Painted by Sir George Beaumont" (1805) are quite another matter. This tempest landscape by the poet's steadfast friend and patron evoked and purged his deepest grief over the recent drowning of his brother in a shipwreck off Weymouth. A little later (1811), Wordsworth wrote a sonnet on another of Beaumont's landscapes and several inscriptions for stones and objects of art in the garden of his estate at Coleorton, Leicestershire. One of these was composed for an urn placed at the end of a newly planted avenue in tribute to the memory of Sir Joshua Reynolds. In 1836, nine years after Beaumont's death, Constable sent to the Royal Academy *The Cenotaph,

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*One wonders which of these interpretations O'Neil would have made of his own practice, both before and after this time. In 1839 and 1840, he exhibited paintings with quotations from Byron; and two of his later pictures, *The Night Before Waterloo* (RA 1868) and *An Incident in the Plague of London* (RA 1875) bore epigraphs from Byron and Pepys respectively.*
147. Henry Thomson, Juliet after the Masquerade (RA 1825) (Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool). A copy of the exhibited picture, which inspired the popular keepsake poet Laetitia Elizabeth Landon to dip her pen lightly in the honorable stream of iconic verse. These lines, from the middle of her "Juliet after the Masquerade," are typical of the whole poem:

And there the maiden leant, still in her ear
The whisper dwelt of that young cavalier;
It was no fancy, he had named the name
Of love, and at that thought her cheek grew flame:
It was the first time her young ear had heard
A lover's burning sigh, or silver word;
Her thoughts were all confusion, but most sweet,—
Her heart beat high, but pleasant was its beat.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, as is well known, wrote many poems, mostly sonnets, to accompany his paintings. A dozen were composed for his oils alone, ranging from The Blessed Damozel and The Girlhood of Mary Virgin to his narrative subject from contemporary life, Found. Rossetti's aversion to exhibiting his paintings prevented the poetry from entering the catalogues, but poems of other Pre-Raphaelites, composed under various circumstances, did appear. After seeing Whistler's The Little White Girl (later renamed Symphony in White, Number Two), Swinburne wrote a poem, "Before the Mirror," which the artist had printed on a gold label for the frame; two stanzas from the poem were quoted in the catalogue when the picture was shown at the Royal Academy in 1865. William Morris composed short poems to accompany Burne-Jones's famous Briar Rose series (pl. 76).

One of Browning's poems, "Eurydice to Orpheus: A Picture by Leighton," was first printed in the Royal Academy catalogue for 1864. In 1886, he composed four lines for another picture by Leighton, a portrait of "a little girl with golden hair and pale blue eyes," but the picture was not exhibited and the lines were not collected in any edition of Browning's works until 1981. Before their marriage, Elizabeth Barrett wrote a sonnet on Haydon's portrait of Wordsworth. No such poems written in the wake of paintings qualified for the suggestion Oscar Wilde made to Rossetti: why not take out the picture and frame the sonnet?*

*Had he possessed a readier wit, Rossetti might have beaten Wilde to the line. He told Swinburne that his poem for the Whistler painting was better than the picture itself, a judgment with which, said Swinburne, the artist enthusiastically agreed (Swinburne to Ruskin, 11 August [1865], in The Swinburne Letters, ed. Cecil V. Lang [New Haven, Conn., 1959–62], 1:130).