"Theatricality" a leading issue in criticism of literary paintings; the forces joining and separating art and the stage.—Costuming and the movement toward historical authenticity.—Caricature, "coarseness," "vulgarity," the desire for "poetry."—The death of Leslie and the controversy over "realism" in Pre-Raphaelite pictures from Keats.

The critics' literal-mindedness in respect to both the literary text and the pictures made from it was a symptom of the positivistic intellectual climate that reached its peak in the mid-Victorian decades. In literary theory, the prevailing philosophical emphasis on scientific (observable) truth took the form of the belief that a modern work of imaginative literature should be judged by its fidelity to life (life selectively idealized, at any rate—not life as uncomfortably, insecurely, even brutally experienced and seen). When art critics required that painters be faithful to their sources, therefore, they were simply upholding the corollary that modern pictorial art which depicted human experience, whether or not it derived from a literary work, should itself be true. Repeatedly they cited Hamlet's admonition to the players: "O'er-step not the modesty of nature."

In effect, this was a prohibition of theatricality—a word and a concept that often figured in the charge that an inventive artist violated an author's intention and spirit. During the most prosperous years of literary painting, one of the major errors of its practitioners, as critics saw it, was an inappropriate staginess of conception and execution. The painter of dramatic subjects, said Henry Nelson O'Neil as late as 1866, "is so influenced by the theatrical presentation of the scenes he selects for illustration, that they cannot fail to modify his own conceptions; and it is for this reason that few pictures of this nature ever satisfy the judgment of those who have read the works of dramatic authors, but have never witnessed their production on the stage." Although the fault was naturally detected most often in paintings derived from the drama, it was by no means limited to them. Dramatic scenes from narrative poetry and fiction were vulnerable to the same charge.
An affinity between the theatrical and painted arts had been recognized since the early eighteenth century. In 1715, Jonathan Richardson had declared that plays were a kind of "moving pictures," and this notion became something of a commonplace in the age's aesthetic thought. Even after Lessing's *Laocöön* caused adherents of the sister-art theory to have second thoughts, it was still agreed that there was a relationship, profitable to consider, between the drama (i.e., the "poetic," Shakespearean kind, not the prose plays written by modern dramatists) and history painting. In 1807, the poet laureate, Henry Pye, recommended that artists learn from stage performances, since "the Drama exhibited on the stage, exceed[s] every species of imitation short of actual deception." Painting and drama alike expressed psychological truth in mimetic form, an equivalence implied in Hazlitt's art criticism and accepted by Coleridge. At the same time, as we shall see, Romantic criticism began to regard the relationship between the representational arts as a mêsalliance rather than a partnership, and it was this that gave rise to the pejorative notion of "theatricality." In practice, the frequent points of contact between fine art and the working theater compromised paintings with literary subjects and significantly affected their reception.

One important link in the eighteenth century was personal. We have noted (chapter 1) the friendship of Hogarth and Garrick, each of whom was influenced by the other's forte. Garrick was an intimate also of Sir Joshua Reynolds, who throughout his life in London frequented the theater, in later years becoming a particular devotee of Mrs. Siddons. Henry Fuseli, fresh from Switzerland, improved his knowledge of the English language by constant attendance at the playhouse, and in the process became another member of Garrick's admiring retinue of artists. Sir Thomas Lawrence, according to the Victorian painter Solomon Hart, had an innate "histrionic taste" that first manifested itself in "the recitations from the drama and British poets with which the young Lawrence entertained his father's customers" (he kept an inn at Devizes, Wiltshire). This penchant, said Hart, "gave a theatrical tone not only to his portraits, but..."
but even to his pictures, embodying a loftier theme. Thus one of his most ambitious illustrations, ‘Satan calling up his Legions,’ . . . savours more of the footlights than of the spirit of true poetry.” Lawrence had close personal ties with the Kemble family—he was successively in love with Mrs. Siddons, her two daughters Sally and Maria, and her niece Fanny—and he painted John Philip as Hamlet (p. 222), Coriolanus (pl. 238), Rolla (in Sheridan’s adaptation of Kotzebue’s Pizarro), and Cato (in Addison’s tragedy). Among the prominent early Victorian painters of narrative subjects, Wilkie, Mulready, Leslie, and Frith were known for their love of the stage. (Some of these might have seen Delacroix during his visit to London in 1825. He went every night to Covent Garden or Drury Lane and, falling under the spell of Kean as Richard III, Othello, and Shylock, discovered the power of Shakespeare’s plays performed in their original language—with momentous effects on his own art.)

Meanwhile, the branch of art devoted to theatrical subjects had flourished under the brushes of Zoffany, DeWilde, Clint, and others. In the first third of the nineteenth century, portraits of actors and actresses in their popular stage roles continued in demand, especially as designs for engravings in editions of plays and, somewhat later, in magazines. Between 1800 and 1825, there were, at most, only four years when paintings from plays, both new and revived, were not exhibited at the Royal Academy. The most talked-of picture for several seasons was George Henry Harlow’s The Court for the Trial of Queen Katherine in Shakespeare’s Henry VIII, shown at the Royal Academy in 1817 (pl. 154). When Fanny Kemble made her debut as Queen Katherine in 1831, she was dressed in the costume made famous by the picture of her aunt in the role and the popular engraving derived from it. Many years later (1875), her friend Edward FitzGerald expressed to her his surprise that “the fine Engraving . . .—once so frequent—is scarce seen now: it has seemed strange to me to meet People who never even heard of it.”

Before this visit, Delacroix, who was already well acquainted with Shakespeare in French translation, had made only a sketch, The Ball at the Capulets. In 1825, he completed two canvases, Desdemona and Emilia and Macbeth Consulting the Witches. Later in his career, he produced sixteen lithographs from Hamlet and paintings from Macbeth, Romeo and Juliet, and Antony and Cleopatra.
155. Henry Andrews, The Trial of Queen Katherine (ca. 1832) (Royal Shakespeare Theatre Picture Gallery ©). In contrast to Harlow's "theatrical conversation piece" in the form of an imagined performance of the trial scene, this is a belated example of a painting derived from an actual production. If, as seems probable, the production was that of Charles Kemble in his last season at Covent Garden (1831–32), the central figure is his daughter Fanny, who succeeded her aunt Sarah Siddons in the role of the queen.

The great age of theatrical portraiture, during which a certain number of pictures at each annual exhibition could be depended upon to remind critics and other spectators what honest "theatricality" was like, ended before mid-century. Macready, Benjamin Webster, and Charles and Ellen Kean were painted several times in the 1840s in their popular roles, as was Samuel Phelps a little later. But the appearance of periodicals like the Illustrated London News had now deprived the theatrical canvas of its prime usefulness. If advertising was the motive behind many of the paintings, characters and scenes from current plays could more easily be brought to the notice of a much wider public through the printed medium. Moreover, the growing popularity of subjects from fiction diverted artists' attention from the contemporary drama as a source of paintable scenes and situations. The only recurrent subject of theatrical portraiture after the middle of the century was Ellen Terry, whom George F. Watts, briefly her husband, painted as Ophelia in 1863–64, fourteen years before she actually took the role at the Lyceum. Beginning in the 1880s, she was portrayed as Beatrice, Portia, Lady Macbeth, and Mrs. Page by such artists as John Singer Sargent (pl. 236), the Honorable John Collier, and Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson, himself an actor as well as artist. Her longtime partner, Henry Irving, could be seen on canvas in several roles, including Benedick and Philip IV in Tennyson's Queen Mary.
Except for a few pictures expressly labeled as such, it is hard to determine how many nineteenth-century paintings of scenes from the drama were derived, either in total composition or in significant details, from actual performances. Unlike Harlow's more famous depiction, Henry Andrews's *Trial of Queen Katherine* (pl. 155) represented an actual production, that of 1831 with Charles and Fanny Kemble. There is some evidence that Ford Madox Brown's long-lived interest in *King Lear* had its origin in Macready's production (1838). Quite untypically for the time, the presence of a proscenium arch in Dadd's *Titania Sleeping* (RA 1841) explicitly related the scene to a stage performance.

If visitors to the exhibitions sometimes detected echoes of the contemporary theater in the year's crop of paintings, theatergoers for their part also saw reflections of familiar pictures in the scenery. Both the scenic and easel arts were affected by the movement toward historical authenticity in setting and costume. Until well past the middle of the eighteenth century, dramas set in some past epoch were regularly performed in modern dress, as is shown, for example, by Zoffany's painting of Garrick and Mrs. Pritchard in *Macbeth* in the 1760s (pl. 156), an easygoing indulgence of anachronism that later appeared in the mad mélange of period styles in Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery. At the turn of the century, one seldom found a picture so marked by historical realism and consistency as the trial scene from *The Merchant of Venice* (ca. 1800) by Richard Smirke, son of the better-known and more prolific Robert. Smirke actually drew his costumes from paintings of the sixteenth-century Venetian school, which was contemporary with the action of Shakespeare’s play.

In the theater, the antiquarian enthusiasm that was one of the products of the new historicism had begun to have its effect on staging that was becoming increasingly pictorial under the influence of such designers as P. J. Loutherbourg for Garrick and William Capon, the pioneer of histor-

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156. Johann Zoffany, *Garrick and Mrs. Pritchard in “Macbeth”* (1768) (Garrick Club). *A Macbeth in contemporary dress*—the usual costuming for eighteenth-century dramas, irrespective of the time or place represented. The Gothic interior is almost equally at odds with the architecture of Scottish castles in Macbeth's time. Compare the anachronistic costuming in Zuccarelli's painting from the play (pl. 22).
ical accuracy in the theater, for John Philip Kemble. History plays were remounted according to current scholarly conceptions of what people in various epochs actually wore and the settings in which they lived. It had to be a gradual process, because, as with Kemble in the 1790s, so much money was tied up in the stock of scenery and costumes that replacements in the elaborately "authentic" style could be afforded only as old equipment was retired.

In literary and historical art, as in the theater, "authenticity" became more and more the watchword, as is demonstrated by Sir Walter Scott's worrying what Richard Westall would do in his projected illustrations for The Lay of the Last Minstrel: "If Westall who is really a man of talent faild in figures of chivalry where he had so many paintings to guide him what in the Devils name will he make of highland figures?[?] I expect to see my chieftain Sir Roderick Dhu . . . in the guize of a recruiting serjaint of the Black Watch and his Bard the very model of Auld Robin Gray upon a japand tea-tray." 13

Scott took justifiable, and timely, pride in his antiquarian expertise in matters of costume and armor, and dispensed it freely to applicants from the theater and the painting room; on the matter of kilts, he informed Haydon that the Scottish Highlanders wore them and another artist, Edward Bird, that the Scottish Borderers did not. 14 His determination to keep details straight probably exerted considerable influence on painters. When John Martin exhibited his Macbeth on the Blasted Heath in 1820, it was well known that he had sought and received expert advice on the tartans his accurately kilted troops wore. Eleven years later, when Scott admired the painting in Martin's studio, he presumably certified its accuracy of detail. 15

In the theater, the issue of authenticity was fortuitously related to the advent of larger and better-equipped theaters in the age of the Keans, Macready, and Phelps. In the big houses, the old limited performance areas, well adapted for intimate acting, were enlarged to "picture" stages—a term rendered all the more apt as the action retreated from the projecting forestage to the area behind the proscenium arch that provided a ready-made frame. These picture stages were, of necessity, dominated by pictorial values and opportunities, thus giving wide scope to effects, such as massive architectural sets and crowds of colorfully costumed extras, that could be treated with large-scaled historical realism. 16

Art imitated the theater, and the theater imitated art: paintings from Shakespeare's history plays came to be laden with "authentic" details, and productions of those plays, such as Kean's King John (1823) and Macready's Coriolanus (1838) were, in effect, three-dimensional, live mountings of the pictures.

The elaboration of scenic splendor sometimes caused the drama to be engulfed by the spectacle, but this was agreeable enough to playgoers who, well acquainted with paintings of Shakespearean characters and scenes, and well educated in printed Shakespearean iconography by a steady stream of illustrated editions of the plays, brought enlarged visual expectations to Shakespearean performances. In their attempts to meet these expectations, managers may have gratified their clientele, but they also had to suffer the protestation voiced, for example, by Clement Scott in an acerb review of the Bancrofts' production of The Merchant of Venice in 1875, with scenery copied from Veronese's The Marriage at Cana, that "the stage is something more than a picture gallery." 17
It is likely that some paintings from nondramatic sources, notably but not exclusively novels, were influenced by theatrical adaptations of those works. The dramatization of novels had begun in the second half of the eighteenth century, shortly after scenes from fiction were first used as the subjects of easel paintings. This exploitation of literary material simultaneously on the stage and in art flourished throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, as hard-pressed writers for the popular theater ransacked the treasury of English fiction for subjects, even as their colleagues the artists were doing the same thing for their own popular market. Allardyce Nicoll's list of plays performed in 1800–1850 alone contains some ninety that were seemingly from literary sources, exclusive of the many from Byron and Scott (which will be discussed in Part Three) and the indeterminable number whose titles do not reveal their literary origin. In the first half of the century, there were at least five plays from Burns. There were also plays from Tristram Shandy, Tom Jones, Clarissa Harlowe, The Vicar of Wakefield, The Rape of the Lock, Robinson Crusoe, and Gothic romances. Sir Roger de Coverley was represented on the stage, as was Izaak Walton. Several productions claimed derivation from Moore's Lalla Rookh. Several more dramatized novels by Bulwer-Lytton—Rienzi, The Last of the Barons, The Last Days of Pompeii, and Eugene Aram. In the second half-century, says Nicoll, there were "many hundreds" of adaptations from fiction. There was even one play whose title, if nothing else, came from The Faerie Queene: Una and the Lions (the plural suggests a connection with the circus).

A further link between the popular stage and art lay in the very nature of the entertainments offered in the contemporary theater. The great majority of plays in this era of melodrama, burletta, and farce were stitched together, ordinarily not very securely, from a series of individual episodes. They appealed to their uncritical audience not because they boasted structural craftsmanship or smooth continuity of narrative, which they seldom did, but by virtue of their separate but frequent moments of extreme emotion, suspense, or hilarity. The prescribed tableaux ("stage pictures") here and there, especially at the act curtains, were only the most obvious manifestations of this emphasis on the single moment rather than the flow of events; a play simply moved from one arresting moment to the next. The popular appeal of many literary pictures was, in this regard, precisely that of the theater. Anecdotal pictures in general had the same basic attractiveness. They were portrayals of incidents, and though a narrative may have been implied—what went before, what might come after—the immediate interest such paintings possessed resided in the single moment represented.

If literary pictures were often nothing more than graphic equivalents of theatrical tableaux, those same tableaux sometimes were overt transcriptions of existing paintings. In James Robinson Planche's melodrama The Brigand (1829), there were stop-action scenes after three paintings by Charles Eastlake, and in Douglas Jerrold's The Rent Day (1832), two tableaux after celebrated paintings by Wilkie, The Rent Day and Distraining for Rent. Hogarth's Harlot's Progress was recreated on the Surrey Theatre stage in a play called The Life of a Woman (1840), and Cruikshank's eight-part series The Bottle turned up in a play of the same name at the City of London Theatre (1847). In the same decade, the cobbled-together, unauthorized stage versions of Dickens's early novels often included tableaux
directly modeled after the familiar engraved illustrations. Other dramatizations of literary works contained similar explicit reminiscences of well-known paintings; in Tom Taylor's first full-length drama, based on *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1850), the tableau that began the second act was designed after Maclise's picture of *Olivia and Sophia Fitting out Moses for the Fair*, shown at the Royal Academy in 1838.\(^{19}\)

In view of this steady commerce between the stage and the studio, artists perhaps should not have been censured as severely as they were—and as we shall now see—for their alleged concession to "theatricality." They may sometimes have sacrificed the dignity of their art, but that was a necessary condition of Victorian popular culture.\(^\dagger\)

Although the visual and dramatic arts retained many points of practical association, equally strong forces tended to distance one from the other, as the history of painting from the drama in the eighteenth century illustrates. When artists first took up such subjects, they retained the theatrical setting, as Hogarth did in the six versions of his *Beggar's Opera* painting in 1728–29 (pl. 1), though they did not follow Hogarth to the extreme of showing members of the audience at the edges of the composition. But as theatrical paintings proliferated, the performance framework came to be dispensed with, as it was in engraved book illustrations, notably Boydell's, and the subject was depicted as a freestanding story, like a scene from a poem or novel, rather than as an acting-out of a literary text by men and women who assumed their roles merely for the two hours' traffic of the stage.

In aesthetic theory, the separation of the performed drama and fine art was widened by the weight of Romantic critical opinion. The crucial figure here, as usual, was Shakespeare. Alderman Boydell's candid admission that painting lacked the power to adequately contain and convey Shakespeare's genius shortly had its counterpart when Romantic critics made the same disclaimer in reference to the other mimetic art. Shakespeare's plays, it was argued, were reduced in stature, their effectiveness drained, by their flesh-and-blood embodiment before an audience in a public place. They were no longer the flawless mirror of nature that they were in silent print. To perform them (not least in the current ruinous adaptations) was inescapably to distort and indeed destroy the poet's intended effect. The priceless illusion could only be maintained within the private imagination. Thus declared Lamb, in his classic essay "On the Tragedies of Shakespeare Considered with Reference to Their Fitness for Stage-Representation," in the course of which occurred the denunciation of Boydell's Gallery already quoted (chapter 2). When Hamlet, Ophelia, Othello, Macbeth, Romeo and Juliet, and above all King Lear are materialized, Lamb argued, they lose their transcendental significance, and the appurtenances of performance—elocution, gesture, costume, and setting—divert attention from the philosophical truths they express.

If the staged drama was an irreparably flawed representation of reality, it followed that paintings which emulated its physical mimesis were doubly removed from truth; and it was from this awareness that the avoidance of theatricality as a critical requirement sprang. Northcote, who contributed nine pictures to the Boydell Gallery, testified to the stage's inadequacy to mediate "reality" from the printed page to canvas. "It is,

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\(^{\dagger}\) Another popular painting by Maclise, *The Play Scene in *Hamlet* (RA 1842) (pl. 219), found its way onto the stage some years later. Lewis Carroll saw Kean's production of the play in January 1856 and recorded that the play scene was "evidently grouped from Maclise's picture." In July 1857, visiting the Royal Academy exhibition, he observed an example of the reverse action: of LeJeune's painting of Queen Katherine's dream in Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*, he wrote that it was "beautiful exceedingly—clearly taken from the scene at the Princess's"—that is, in Kean's unforgettable spectacular production of 1855. [The Diaries of Lewis Carroll, ed. Roger Lancelyn Green (New York, 1954). I:73, 115.]

\(^\dagger\) A much later, and quite different, example of three-way interaction between literature, painting, and the stage is offered by Hardy's Desperate Remedies (1871). In the novel, Manston's wife, overhearing the conversation of Cythera and Owen, is described as standing "as precisely in the attitude of Imogen by the cave of Belarius, as if she had studied the position from the play." A recent critic has suggested that Hardy had in mind Helen Faucit's performance as Imogen in *Cymbeline*, the *Times*, she points out, had said of the actress's "timid approach . . . to the cave of Belarius," that "it is a study for the painter" (Grundy, *Hardy and the Sister Arts*, pp. 79–80). Imogen at the cave of Belarius was, in fact, a recurrent subject of literary pictures (pls. 100, 132, 239, 240).
surely," he said, "not the province of one art to imitate another. . . . To paint, therefore, the passions from the exhibitions of them on the stage . . . is to remove yourself one degree farther from truth." 20 

Richard Westall, another fecund source of Boydell paintings, told Farington in 1806 that "he had never seen the Character of Falstaff exhibited on the stage, and should not be induced to it unless tempted by a very extraordinary account given of some one who may attempt it. At present," noted Farington, "he has in His imagination the Character personified & is not willing to interrupt that idea by an imperfect representation very different from it." 21 

Sir George Beaumont recognized and approved such a refusal to risk an "ideal" conception by exposing it to the reductive and coarsening influence of the stage. With Shakespeare, he wrote Haydon, "you not only have the powerful productions of his mind's pencil to contend with, but also the perverted representations of the theatres, which have made such impressions on most people in early life, that I, for my part, feel it more difficult to form a picture in my mind from any scene of his that I have seen frequently represented, than from the works of any other poet." 22 

Frith's level-headed patron John Gibbons agreed. Shakespeare, he wrote the artist in 1843, "is rather a dangerous fellow to meddle with. . . . In fact, it appears to me that theatrical subjects are seldom good ones. If treated theatrically, they are vile, and if not, they are almost sure to disturb some settled preoccupation, and we miss the 'old familiar faces'—the O'Neill, the Kean, the Munden—and are loth to accept of other representations." 23 

And so the practice, though not the stated policy, of Boydell's painters combined with the idealism of the Romantic critics to encourage artists, buyers, and reviewers alike to look upon pictures derived from the drama, not as representations of performances real or imaginary, but as subjects derived directly from books, the true mirror of nature. This was the atmosphere of opinion in which it came to be stipulated that paintings of dramatic subjects, whether actually from the drama or from any other form of narrative literature, be free of any suggestion of gaslights and histrionic exaggerations of real-life deportment. Literary art should never suggest the tastes of the heterogeneous audiences that filled the great barns of Covent Garden and Drury Lane and, even worse, the "minor" theaters patronized by the unruly working class. (Behind the whole aversion to theatricalism lurked an element of social disapproval. The theater was a form of public amusement avoided for virtuous reasons by considerable sections of English society; among these, it had no claim to be a legitimate form of literary expression.) Any detectable aura of the stage in a painting inescapably cheapened it, defiling the "poetry" or at the very least the truth to life that one reasonably expected to find in it.

Although no cause-effect relationship was implied, as early as 1831 a writer in Fraser's Magazine found a kinship between the current drama and art in the deplorable parallel courses they were following: "As on the stage itself, so likewise in painting, farce and melodrame appear to be the order of the day: whatever is not the former, partakes of the latter, till nature on the one hand, and poetry on the other, will soon be as completely banished from fashionable pictures as they already are from fashionable novels." 24 

In view of the flood of literary paintings soon to come, in which farce and melodrama had their due place, the writer's lamentation was as timely (and prophetic) as it proved to be unheeded. To be sure,
almost at the same moment that Gibbons was writing to Frith, the Times, reviewing the 1843 Royal Academy exhibition, professed to find grounds for believing that the theatricalism of which he complained was declining. The paintings from Shakespeare, it said, “represent the characters in the plays without the intervention of the actors who now-a-days undertake to play the parts. This shows an improvement in the taste of artists, and brings the spectator more immediately in connexion with the author and his meaning, than when transmitted through the insipidity or absurdity of an intermediate agency.”

Such optimism, however, was ill founded. By this time—the mid-1840s—the issue that had been smoldering for many years burst into flame. Looking back from the vantage point of many years, Holman Hunt recalled (with obvious exaggeration) that every episodic painting then was planned as for the stage, with second-rate actors to play the parts, striving to look not like sober live men, but pageant statues of waxwork. Knights were frowning and staring as none but hired supernumeraries could stare; the pious had vitreous tears on their reverential cheeks; innkeepers were ever round and red-faced; peasants had complexions of dainty pink; shepherdesses were fac-
similed from Dresden-china toys; homely couples were ever reading a Family Bible to a circle of most exemplary children; all alike from king to plebeian were arrayed in clothes fresh from the bandbox.26

The gravamen of critics' assault on theatricality in painting centered on overtly histrionic gestures and poses, artificial or too fussy background, and garish lighting. Although we cannot tell how many artists consciously or unconsciously copied the appearance and postures of the stars of the day in their most popular roles, they could scarcely have escaped being affected by the attitude-striking style favored by the performing practice of the time. There was a well-known distinction between naturalistic and "formal," or rhetorical, acting, and it was this latter kind to which critics referred when they accused artists of theatricality. Sometimes the portrayals of dramatic poses and scenes, both on the stage and in easel art, may have been influenced by a common source, manuals of "iconographic language" that were to actors what such classic treatises as Charles Lebrun's La Méthode pour apprendre à dessiner les passions and Gerard de Lairesse's The Art of Painting in All its Branches had been to generations of painters. The techniques that worked on the stage seemed wholly transferable to paint; in Gilbert Austin's Chironomia (1806), for instance, Kemble's acting was described as "the perfection and the glory of art, so finished, that every look is a commentary, every tone an illustration, every gesture a model for the statuary, and a study for the painter."27

Tirelessly repeated from the 1840s onward, "theatricality" was a smear word of wide application, as "Pre-Raphaelite" became on different grounds. In 1856, a leading writer on aesthetics, E. S. Dallas, used the artistic miscalculations and deficiencies it connoted as a comprehensive means of deploring the present state of English painting. "The more narrowly we examine the sister arts," he said,

\[\text{the more nearly do we find that they assimilate. . . . Look at the walls of our exhibition-rooms, and behold the inanities that figure there, contemporary with the inanities of the theatre. This picture either displays as little action as a modern tragedy, or its action is as spasmodic as an Adelphi melodrama. In how many of these pictures do we find the artists compensating for bad drawing with gaudy colour, hiding vacancy of expression in a blaze of light, feebleness of passion in a tornado of shadows, and blundering perspective, aerial and linear, in a mist as convenient as the clouds by which the gods of Homer save their heroes from the lances of the enemy? The very faults we find in the theatre! Eternal mannerism, stagnacy, mimicry, trickery, grimacing, catchwords, red lights and blue lights, and the name of the perruquier mentioned in the playbills in large letters! . . . Whether on the boards or on the canvass, incapacity and commonplace issue in virtually the same results.}\]

As was to be expected, theatricalism resided to some degree in the eye of the beholder. What smelled of gaslights to one reviewer was to another redolent with the fragrance of art lovingly studied from life. The Times said that Ophelia, in Frank Stone's painting of 1845, had "a certain intensity of expression, which borders on the theatrical"; but the Examiner, reporting on the same canvas, declared that "the madness of pure Ophelia has nothing in it affected or merely theatrical."29 A generation later, in 1872, the Saturday Review was enchanted by John Pettie's Silvius and Phoebe (pl. 81). "The characters," it said, "are creatures of the woods and fields; Silvius looks lovesick and silly, while saucy Phebe is bewitchingly pert."30 The Athenæum, however, saw it differently:
158. George Clint, Falstaff and Mistress Ford (British Institution 1831) (Tate Gallery, London). The Examiner (20 February) called this scene from The Merry Wives of Windsor (3. 3) "one of the ablest dramatic pieces ever painted," in which the artist took care not to "overstep the modesty of nature"; but the Athenaeum (12 February) complained that "Mr. Clint renders Shakespeare too theatrically"—as well he might have, considering that he had devoted his career to theatrical pictures.

*It was bad enough for the 1858 reviewer, just quoted, to allude to the Surrey Theatre, the transpontine playhouse where low life congregated to watch blood-and-thunder melodramas, but this was the unkindest cut of all. After long service as a summer evening rendezvous for entertainment-seeking Londoners (and, not incidentally, the first place where subject art was made accessible to the general public, through the supper-box paintings by Hayman and others), the gardens had degenerated by Victorian times into a dilapidated haunt of dubious characters, including flocks of prostitutes. Vauxhall had finally closed, lamented except by this clientele, in 1859.

Reviewers may not always have agreed on what they saw in a given picture, but, evading the fact that Shakespeare had written his plays in the first place for the performing theater, albeit one that lacked scenic capability, they were unanimously of the opinion that a new painting from Shakespeare should contain no hint of the stage. They might even, on occasion, go so far as to urge artists to eliminate the very qualities that made Shakespeare good theater, as when Elmore’s picture of Hero fainting in church, in Much Ado About Nothing, was censured in 1846 for being executed "with a theatrical effect somewhat too clearly akin to the theatrical nature of his subject."

For the next thirty years, each season’s allotment of new paintings from Shakespeare was put to the test of theatricality, and in many pictures the results were discouragingly positive. In 1848, of a picture of Lear meeting Edgar on the stormy heath: “exaggerated even beyond the stage representations.” In 1852, of a picture of Hortensio and Katherine in The Taming of the Shrew: “the contrasts are violent, and the scene seems too theatrical even for that forcible and demonstrative play.” In 1858, of the all too familiar parting-at-dawn scene in Romeo and Juliet: “... ghastly ... taken, we should think, from a melodrama at the Surrey Theatre.” In 1864, of one of the two Romeo and Juliet paintings A. J. Woolmer exhibited that year: “The moon cast an opal light upon the terrace steps, against which contends the golden lustre of the lamps. In the foreground blossoms an oleander, and clustered grapes and rich rinded gourds group with Juliet and her nurse. In all this getting up we are perhaps a little too closely reminded of Vauxhall; we see the smoke and smell the rankness of the oil.” In 1867, of Orchardson’s Talbot and the Countess of Auvergne (1 Henry VI):

... the very presentation of a stage-scene, from the manner in which the English lord and his followers enter the chamber by a “practicable” door to the vast extent of bare boards that form the floor of the painted theatre, and, above all, the action of the ill-favoured and excessively quaint lady who clenches her hands in dismay. The very lighting of the picture recalls the forced mode of the theatre, not less so the mean, worn-out state of the tapestries and furniture of the chamber.

It will be noticed that nowhere in this sampling of contemporary comment is there any repetition of the older view, expressed by Boydell and Lamb among others, that Shakespeare was beyond the reach of mimetic art. The critics’ only demand was that the Shakespearean artist place himself beyond the reach of the theater. By the 1870s, as we shall see in chapter 12, the whole question, happily, was becoming moot. As the Victorian period drew to a close, and even as Irving and Beerbohm Tree were giving new life to Shakespeare on the stage, artists’ interest in the plays as a subject for painting steadily declined.

One particular kind of literary painting, involving the adjacent issues of theatricality and historical authenticity, thrust art critics into a dilemma
they never wholly resolved. The picture replete with period costume and accessories, whose proven popularity was among the main reasons why literary sources were so often drawn upon, elicited both admiration and censure. A play or novel, or the particular scene chosen, may have had little else to recommend it to the artist; but if it afforded him a chance to portray women in rich satins and brocades, fans in hand, and men in flowing wigs and knee breeches, swords at side, its credentials as a vendible subject for art were adequate. These were the kind of paintings favored by Sir Leiceste Dedlock in Dickens’s Bleak House: “the Fancy Ball School in which Art occasionally condescends to become a master, which would be best catalogued like the miscellaneous articles in a sale. As, . . . ‘One stone terrace (cracked), one gondola in distance, one Venetian senator’s dress complete, richly embroidered white satin costume with profile portrait of Miss Jogg the model, one scimitar superbly mounted in gold with jewelled handle, elaborate Moorish dress (very rare) and Othello’” (chap. 29).

This taste was but one manifestation of the enthusiasm for portrayals of history in general that spread in the time of Scott. Scenes from English life from the Middle Ages to the reign of Queen Anne, including subjects from the literature of the time, grew in demand; and as the nineteenth century progressed, the increasingly distant decades of the first Georges also qualified as a source of historical subjects. For artists, there was the additional attraction of recalling their earliest distinguished forebears on English soil, the succession of great portraitists from Holbein downward. Where seventeenth- and eighteenth-century writers had actually been painted by Kneller (Pepys, Evelyn, Congreve, Addison, Pope) and Reynolds (Boswell, Johnson, Sterne, Garrick, Sheridan, Goldsmith), there was further incentive to select biographical subjects that allowed reminiscences of well-known existing portraits to be introduced. Moreover, in the

159. Henry J. Fradelle, Othello Relating the Story of His Life (RA 1824) (Royal Shakespeare Theatre Picture Gallery ©). Although not all the details in Dickens’s description of a “Fancy Ball School” Othello painting are found in this picture, it well illustrates what he meant.
eighteenth century, long after Van Dyck finished his work, it had remained the fashion for women to affect, and be painted in, the "Van Dyck" dress indelibly associated with his many portraits. In 1741, exactly a century after the artist's death, Horace Walpole reported to Sir Horace Mann that he had seen at a masquerade at the Duchess of Norfolk's "quantities of pretty Van Dyckes and all kinds of old pictures, walked out of their frames." For Victorian painters, portraying women in fashionably antiquated Van Dyck costume in scenes from the *Spectator* or *The Rape of the Lock*, or for that matter in the even more elaborate dress seen in Nicholas Hilliard's miniatures of Elizabethan men and women, had the inestimable additional appeal of sheer escapism. It was delightful to find, in the elegance of an earlier time, relief from the drabness, the almost ostentatious lack of decoration, that characterized the garb of Victorian men especially, now that the wastrel resplendence of the Regency dandy had faded away into bourgeois sobriety. Portraits and scenes from contemporary life, "hat and trousers pictures" as Frith disparagingly called them, seemed to betray one of the very purposes of painted art.

Under the watchful eye of the new historic spirit, this graphic evocation of bygone English scenes, in art as on the stage, had to be achieved with dedicated regard for authenticity. At least one Victorian painter, John Faed, borrowed costumes from Madame Tussaud's, whose designers reportedly had done as much research in the area as Macready's costumemakers. On one occasion, when he asked leave to copy the dress worn by one of the waxwork wives of Henry VIII, Joseph Tussaud, who knew the value of free publicity in the form of production credits, sent him a whole trunkful of costumes from every period figuring in the famous exhibition.

Many of the hundreds of literary period pieces displayed in the exhibitions received unstinted praise; men and women were dressed to the tiniest detail specified in costume books or seen in paintings and engravings from the time concerned, and the settings were furnished with a wealth of authentic accessories—an unsurpassable means of blending the pleasure of the eye with reliable instruction. Typically, E. M. Ward's *Amy Robsart and Leicester at Cumnor Hall* (RA 1866) was hailed as a triumph of
visual evocation, the very curtains being as vivid as the costumes of the figures. "A picture de luxe," said the Art Journal. "Never were silk stockings, satin and velvet robes, jewels, and dazzling orders, rendered in greater truth and lustre." "A rich sweetmeat to the eye," summed up the Examiner.

But, echoing dramatic critics' frequent complaint against the overloading of the stage with distracting "archaeologically correct" settings, art critics often deplored the fussiness of some artists who were more concerned with historical accuracy than with capturing the true spirit of the literary subject, whatever it may have been. And, just as they relished catching one artist in the very act of deviating from the plain letter of the text (see chapter 10), so they matched another's pedantry with their own as they scrutinized his canvas for anachronisms, down to the last snuffbox and shoe buckle. Reviewing the Academy show of 1855, the unusually dyspeptic Athenaeum critic began by commenting on the unhistorical dress and details to be seen in Frith's Maria Tricks Malvolio and then lighted upon Maclise's painting of the wrestling scene in As You Like It: "an Elizabethan house with a Victoria[n] conservatory,—a nondescript Duke with barbaric Saxon buskins and a Louis the Tenth hat,—a medieval jester,—and passion-flowers, which were first brought from South America! What a patchwork is this!" The reviewer then turned his keen and hopeful eye to a picture of John Evelyn's first meeting with Grinling Gibbons in 1671, pointing out first that the painter contravened the literary text by locating the meeting in "a sort of cool garden-house, surrounded by jars and shavings, and before a blocked-up window, festooned with cobwebs," whereas "he was found by Evelyn, if we remember rightly, in a room in the Belle Sauvage Yard." Piling Pelion on Ossa, the reviewer went on to observe that Evelyn was mistakenly clad as a Dutch peasant and that "Gibbons wears a beard, though beards were abandoned at the Restoration, and carves a crucifix, although the No Popery riots were at their height at this period."

In many such criticisms of costume pictures, the term "Wardour Street" turned up, this site of the trade in pseudo antiques linking the historical pretensions of the art gallery with those of the theater. Thus the charge of theatricality often involved this extra element of artificiality, violation of the truth-to-nature that resided in genuine historical re-creation. By 1882, the Royal Academy obsession with picturesque old-time costume and accessories, so suggestive of the overdressed pieces in the theater, stirred Harry Quilter to protest:

It sounds like a satire, but it is really a fact, that the same ruffs, boots, and breeches re-appear year after year on the Academic walls, till their inanimate faces are as well known as those of any of the gilded youths, whose canes, flowers, and toothpicks make the glory of the Gaiety Theatre. Thus, Mr. Marks [in a picture from 2 Henry VI] affects a long waistless medieval garment, with hanging sleeves; Mr. Horsley rarely escapes from doublet and hose; Mr. Pettie dates his costumes chiefly from the seventeenth century; Mr. Yeames takes us back to Queen Elizabeth, or perhaps to King John [the picture in question was actually from King John] . . .

and so on, to the specialists in late eighteenth-century, Eastern, Spanish, Roman and pre-Christian dress. It was this participation in the continuing manufacture of marketable costume pieces that kept literary pictures arriving at the exhibitions long after their subjects had lost their intrinsic interest.

*This was a bad day for pedantry in art criticism. The reviewer did not remember rightly. For one thing, the scene of the meeting was, in Evelyn's own words, "a poore solitary thatched house, in a field in our Parish, near Sayes Court." For another, the outburst of anti-Catholic hysteria the writer presumably refers to was seven years in the future (a consequence of Titus Oates's alleged "Popish plot", 1678), and what history usually calls the "No Popery riots" did not occur until more than a century later, in 1780.
Charles R. Leslie, *Scene from “Twelfth Night”* (RA 1842) (Tate Gallery, London). A sketch, dated 1841, for the finished painting, commissioned by the banker Thomas Baring. The moment is in act 1, scene 3, when Sir Toby Belch instructs the bashful rustic Sir Andrew Aguecheek in the niceties of gallant courtship.

Not far distant from theatricality in untruthfulness to nature was caricature. At certain times and under certain circumstances, English popular taste ran strongly toward physical distortion as a form of satire, as the fame of Hogarth, Gillray, Rowlandson, George Cruikshank, and the Punch coterie of artists bears witness. Dickens was a master of verbal caricature, and comic facial exaggeration could be found even in the apparatus of children’s games. But caricature was an alien element in any art that was to be taken seriously, and the suspicion of its presence in painting could not be ignored, particularly when the subject was a serious one from literature. In theatrical terms, caricature was the effect produced by “intensity of expression bordering on the theatrical” such as the Times noted in Stone’s *Ophelia* in the review quoted above, or by the equally exaggerated bodily attitudes assumed in stop-action tableaux.

Degeneration into caricature was, of course, a hazard inherent in any work of art that attempted to convey the dynamism of strong emotion by a frozen expression or posture, and artists had before them the abundant examples of Old Masters who had successfully avoided it. It was grounds for special praise when a painter, such as Leslie in his picture of the “Accost, Sir Andrew, accost!” scene in *Twelfth Night* (pl. 161), could be said to have produced “a pure transcript of Shakespeare on canvas, without the theatrical exaggerations by which the illustrations of the great bard are deformed and distorted in the hands of artists whose only conception of his character is taken from the absurdities of the buffoons, by whom they are caricatured.” But once again, it depended on whose eyes looked at a picture. Commenting on Dyce’s picture of *Lear and the Fool in the Storm* (RA 1851), the Literary Gazette began by saying that “nothing could be more trying than to paint rage so close on madness in an old man without caricature,” but went on to imply, by the judicious praise it meted out, that Dyce had succeeded. The Times, by contrast, declared bluntly
that "he has converted the dignity of Lear defying the storm into the
distraction of an old clothesman, and the biting jests of the Fool into a
bestial caricature of humanity."47

Another respect in which artists sometimes were faulted for departing
from the spirit of the literary original was a lapse from dignity into some­
thing variously called "coarseness" or "vulgarity." These too were epi­
thets that were easier to fling than to define, but in a society so concerned
with decorum of conduct and appearance as a sign of status, the disap­
proval they conveyed was a weighty one. Thus the Athenaeum denounced
Holman Hunt's then controversial, now celebrated, painting of Claudio and
Isabella (pl. 195): "Claudio is, after all, but a vulgar lout, and Isabella a
homely creature who never could have inspired the passion of Angelo. If
Mr. Hunt will not give us beauty, at least let him refrain from idealizing
vulgarity."48 Whatever "vulgarity" meant, it evidently was so conspicuous
in some canvases that critics on rival papers, presumably viewing an exhi­
bition independently, detected it at once in the same picture. On 2 April
1859, both the Athenaeum and the Literary Gazette reported on a minor
artist's painting of the closet scene in Hamlet. "Hamlet," said one, "with his
stockings down at heel, seems in a vulgar fright, and is yet running pug­
naciously at his father, who seems a sort of frightened Jupiter."49 Hamlet,
said the other, "is in face, attitude, and costume, an entire misconcep­
tion—coarse, vulgar, melodramatic; the Ghost is most unghostly; and the
Queen thoroughly plebeian."50

The writer's use of "plebeian" in this context helps focus the intent of
"vulgar": it meant, among other things, the artist's diminution of the
character's social rank. Hamlet and the Queen were royalty, and, what­
ever their mental state, should be portrayed with suitable dignity or maj­
esty, as such men and women of high degree were always depicted in high
art. When they were not, they were "vulgar." So too did Shakespeare
intend Petruchio to be a gentleman; Augustus Egg, according to the Art
Journal, diminished him to a knockabout comedian in his scene from The
Taming of the Shrew exhibited in 1860, and to that extent was untrue to
Shakespeare.51

162. John Gilbert, Petruchio Brings Home His Wife (British Institution 1860) (Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery).
"It would be hard," said the Literary Gazette (18 February), "to express the loathing this vulgar 'effusion' excites." But it possessed no qualities that set it apart from other Victorian treatments of Shakespearean comedy, and the "vulgarity" attributed to it was the common property of hundreds of such pictures, a reflection of honest middle-class taste.
To require a painter to discriminate between the subtle physical attributes of high station and low, apart from costume and accessories, called for powers that few artists possessed enough of to satisfy the capricious eye of a viewer anxious for such distinctions. But the most elusive quality critics sought in literary pictures was "poetry": the fragile, impalpable, undefinable essence of delight that, of all the qualities literature possessed, was most tirelessly insisted upon, except in certain categories of subjects from fiction and drama. It was looked for most often in paintings from Shakespeare, especially *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*, and Milton's *Comus*, the three sources from which most of the so-called ideal pictures of the period 1820–50 were taken. Here the artist was most free to stray from the letter of the text, or, more precisely, to use it simply as the point of departure for his fancy. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a critic wrote in 1841, "can only be illustrated when Fantasy, and not Flesh-and-Blood, holds the pencil." To say of a painter, as the *Examiner* said of Maclise's picture of Puck Disenchanting Bottom (RA 1832), that he "has embodied the creations of Shakespeare with spirit, originality, and poetical feeling" was to award him the highest praise possible.

Few iconographic figures were more "poetical" to early Victorian sensibilities than fairies and other insubstantial beings. Angels of various degrees in the celestial hierarchy had offered no difficulty to religious painters, but their secular counterparts posed a problem in this materialistic age, the suspension of disbelief being less willing in the case of literary fairies, nymphs, and sylphs than in that of supernatural agents bearing scriptural or hagiographical credentials. Admittedly, the book illustrators of an earlier generation had not hesitated to depict the incorporeal; and to judge from the esteem in which their engravings were held, they had succeeded. William Bell Scott wrote of the illustrations in Cooke's edition of the British poets:

In point of invention these were extremely fanciful. The poet could not use a figure of speech but the artist without scruple seized upon it as a subject. If the poet said—

> It seemed that she had stolen all Cupid's shafts
the painter forthwith represented Cupid sleeping under a tree and a nymph snatching away his quiver. Cupid played a great role indeed in these pretty little prints, and emblems of all the virtues and vices were freely used.

> Cupid claims the dart and quiver,
But 'tis Fancy twangs the bow,
were represented by a large demonstrative emblematic young lady kneeling on a cloud, and the dangerous boy skipping by her side prompting her to shoot, which she does in the most elegant attitude, not the least as if she expected to hit. At that time imitative art competed with poetry, the mistress of all the arts, in dealing with the incorporeal: it was not to be limited by the natural!

But now, in a new era of relative realism and toughminded critics, the painter of supernatural beings took a considerable chance, and often failed. Eastlake's contribution to the Buckingham Palace pavilion decorations (see Part Three, below, under Milton), an illustration of the epilogue of the Spirits in *Comus*, ran afoul of the *New Monthly Magazine*: "If such be Mr. Eastlake's interpretation of Milton, then the whole world has all along been at fault in its conception of those divine etherial essences. There never was conceived such a flight of spirits—such puddings of hands and
feet—such black holes for eyes—such blue wings—such vile colours of dresses—such brown rocks and woolly clouds.\(^5\) (According to Thackeray, the spirits in the picture were better fed than the artist, who "has kept his promise, has worked the given number of hours; but he has had no food all the while, and has executed his job in a somewhat faint manner.")\(^6\)

During the vogue for fairy pictures in the forties, most artists got off more easily than did Eastlake; nobody seems to have objected to Dadd’s fairies with their gossamer wings and well rounded, fleshy bosoms. No painter’s fairies were triumphs of imaginative art, but people seem to have been determined to like these excursions into the realm of Faery as a relief from the frictions and anxieties of the Chartist years. But this tolerance did not last into the fifties, when the *Times*, for example, protested that "we do not want to see Ariel and the spirits of the Enchanted Isle in the attitudes and shapes of green goblins" in Millais’s much-abused *Ferdinand Lured by Ariel* (pl. 248).\(^7\) On this score, reviewers were particularly hard on F. R. Pickersgill’s rendition of several scenes in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* in a single picture (RA 1856). At least three complained in unison of, as one put it, "the pink, plump cupids which float bodily in the air, in defiance of gravitation."\(^8\) Unfortunately, at this moment the theater offered a precedent for such a violation of probability when the Shakespearean productions of Charles Kean and Samuel Phelps flew angels on wires. A criticism in 1857 of one more rendition of Queen Katherine’s dream in *Henry VIII* was that it “follows . . . the feeling of the representation at the Princess’ Theatre, [rather] than the descriptive text of the play. We see, therefore, the angels hovering over the Queen, the nearest presenting the crown of which she speaks to Griffith."\(^9\) Literalism in the theater or in art could hardly go further.

This, then, was the simple requirement for literary paintings during the decades when they were before the public in the largest quantities: portray what the writer described, without exaggeration, without the expressive intervention of the artist, faithful not only to the text but to life as it is observed. The criterion stemmed, in part, from the debate over the

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realism of Crabbe's poetry and the acceptability of genre painting in the hierarchy of kinds (see chapter 3, above) which had proved a harbinger of the moderate realism of genre art in the days of Wilkie, Mulready, and Webster. Now, more than a generation later, several events occurred that in long perspective can be seen to have marked another, equally decisive, turning point in the history of literary painting, this time away from the notion of the illustrator as subservient to the literary text.

One such event was the death of Leslie in 1859 and the revised judgment of his work that it occasioned. He had been the archetypal painter of literary subjects. As a publisher's apprentice in Philadelphia early in the century, he had acquired a pronounced taste for literature, one that was sharpened when he came to London as an aspiring painter and fell into the company of Coleridge and Washington Irving. By the 1830s, he was receiving the large sum of five hundred guineas apiece for his engaging canvases from English literature—a sure sign of the accuracy with which he estimated public taste. But he outlived his popularity.

Reviewing his career seven years after his death, the brothers Redgrave declared that the key to his success had been his adroit exploitation of Goldsmith's, Sterne's, and Shakespeare's invention by "entering into the true spirit of the poet or writer" without adding anything extraneous.60 "Some artists of very powerful originality," echoed F. T. Palgrave, "have . . . frankly quitted the book before them to give us something of their own, widely different from their original and, perhaps (as when Turner illustrated Rogers), greatly superior to it. This, however, was not Leslie's way; it would have shocked his natural modesty to think of dealing so, even with the minor writers whom he illustrated; he keeps always within what may be called the literary side of his art; he wishes us to think, not of himself, but of Cervantes or Shakespeare; beneath their individuality he is content to sink his own."61

Few critics during Leslie's most prosperous years had depreciated his art on these grounds, though they occasionally faulted it on others. Clearly the temper of opinion in respect to literary illustration was changing in the 1860s. That Leslie had been the prime example of an illustrator who was wholly faithful to the letter and spirit of his source was now counted against him. The thrust of the original Pre-Raphaelites' thinking was away from the autonomy of the literary work that was implied by the mechanical concept of faithful illustration. Thus they revived and practiced a basic principle of Romanticism, reasserting, on a high level once more, the sisterhood of the arts. From their first days as a vigorously dissident coterie, the Pre-Raphaelites were distinguished for their endorsement of working back and forth between poetry and painting. Emblemated by their short-lived magazine, The Germ, subtitled Thoughts Towards Nature in Poetry, Literature, and Art and after the second issue renamed Art and Poetry, the principle was implemented mainly by Rossetti, whose constant aim was not merely to bring the two arts into conjunction but to blend them, the picture becoming at once a separate entity and an expression of the poem, the free-standing poem in its turn becoming a realization of the picture. In either case, he sought to fuse the two so intimately that henceforth they could not be seen as other than an expression of a single impulse or idea. Whether this was "illustration" carried to its ultimate refinement or the very antithesis of the concept depended on the relative strength of representation and subjectivism.
contained in a given example—as well as on which sense of the word was applied.

Although it is hard to distinguish between cause and effect, this commitment to the affinity between poetry and painting was evidenced by the earliest Pre-Raphaelites' considerable interest in literary subject matter for their art. (The oil paintings they derived from English literature were relatively few; their pen-and-ink, crayon, and pencil drawings and watercolors were much more numerous.) As early as 1844, Ford Madox Brown, who, as Christopher Wood has remarked, "was never a member of the Brotherhood, although clearly he was the one artist who should have been," executed sixteen outline drawings from *King Lear*. Rossetti, his pupil, had already counted among his very earliest juvenilia pen-and-ink sketches of a scene from *Ivanhoe*, the death of Marmion, and a scene from *King John*; and in the years before he brought the Brotherhood together (1848), he found subjects also in *As You Like It*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Mrs. Browning's *The Romaunt of Margret*, Coleridge's "Love," Keats's "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," and Poe's "Ulalume" and "The Raven." In the next decade, he would add to the list pictures from Browning's "Pippa Passes" and "The Laboratory" and, more important, episodes from Malory's *Morte Darthur* for the Oxford Union (see Part Three, below, under Malory). Later he would turn to Shakespeare's tragedies, *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, and *Othello*. Among them, the Pre-Raphaelites produced more than sixty illustrations from Shakespeare alone.

Their impatience with the constraints imposed by the principle of literal fidelity found a sharp focus in 1857, in the affair of Moxon's Illustrated Edition of Tennyson's poems (see Part Three, below, under Tennyson). Among the artists the publisher commissioned were Rossetti, Millais, and Holman Hunt, the standard-bearers of the freedom-of-interpretation principle. The poet laureate, on the other hand, turned out to be the most dedicated living representative of all the poets in whose behalf reviewers had fought the battle of artistic fidelity to the text. As the project evolved, Tennyson fiercely defended the integrity of every detail in his poems, resenting every slight novelty or departure from the verbal image that Hunt, in particular, ventured to introduce into his designs. "I didn't say her hair was blown about like that," said Tennyson, objecting to Hunt's attempt to convey, through the Lady of Shalott's disheveled coiffure, the feeling of the disaster that had overcome her. He rejected the steps Hunt inserted into his illustration for the poem of King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid: no steps were mentioned in the poem. This most unhappy collaboration, a traumatic experience for the combatants and a money-losing one for the publisher, dramatized the issue as no other single event did.

But it was Keats who most engaged the pictorial fancies of the Pre-Raphaelites, and two paintings from Keats, exhibited five years apart, evoked reviews that well epitomized the widening difference of opinion on the question of the painter's right to deviate from his literary source. Here the issue was not complicated by the existence of prior treatments by well-known artists; Keats's record in art was a virtual (not total) *tabula rasa* when the Pre-Raphaelites discovered him (see Part Three, below, under Keats), and so they could realize his subjects in paint without the intervention of any predecessor. The question of fidelity was not raised in the reviews of the few Keats pictures that were produced down to 1863. But
in that year, critics of Millais's *The Eve of St. Agnes* did raise it, and W. M. Rossetti promptly responded to their objections in the June issue of *Fraser's Magazine*:

Keats places Madeline's bed behind her (a point of some importance to the incident, because Madeline "dares not look behind, or all the charm is fled"); Mr. Millais, in front of her; Keats's scene is Medieval, Mr. Millais's Jacobean; Keats's window is "triple-arched," Mr. Millais's square and square-mullioned; Keats's moonlight (we have heard even this proposed as an objection to the picture) is inaccurately like sunlight in the colours which it casts from the window; Mr. Millais's is accurately silvered down.

"All these discrepancies are truly stated," Rossetti conceded:

What is the upshot of them with regard to Mr. Millais's picture? Simply this: that he was under no obligation to cite Keats as an authority for his picture of a girl going to bed by moonlight in a chamber with a painted window, but that he chose to do for the sake of the association and the interest thence derivable. For our own part we do not dissent from his preference: we would rather remember the picture in connexion with the lovely passage from Keats, link together in our mind Keats's Madeline and Millais's maiden, and gulp down the discrepancies for the sake of the association, than have nothing to think about except the girl and the moonlight. . . . The whole question, however, from this literal point of view, is of next to no consequence. It is as likely as not that Mr. Millais's real inspiration was not Keats's poem at all, but the moonlight which he saw, or which he thought he would like to see to paint a picture of.66

The critic who disapproved of Millais's moonlight, an objection of which Rossetti made more than is quoted here, was Palgrave, writing in the *Saturday Review* for 16 May. "Keats, as is well known," he said,

poetically gave the tints of sunlight passing through gorgeous glass to the wintry moonbeams which colour his heroine with more than Venetian splendour. This was, perhaps, a just license to the artist who paints in words. He who paints in colours has, with equal justice, corrected the image, and thrown over his figure pale lurid rays, which rarely carry with them any indication of warmth. . . . But we must venture to urge, that Mr. Millais's amended version of the great Poet—and of the great Poet in his greatest work—should have stopped here.

Such literalist criticism placed the artist in a predicament from which there was no easy escape. If he followed Keats's alleged error and depicted moonlight in terms of sunlight, he was untrue to observed reality; if he corrected Keats's error and painted moonlight as moonlight, he did violence to the poetic text. And, as a matter of fact, the volatile mixing of Keatsian imagery, so specifically colorful, with the Pre-Raphaelite penchant for vivid hues could scarcely have avoided critical eruptions like Palgrave's. The loving sensuousness with which Keats described Madeline gave critics an additional pretext for denouncing the Pre-Raphaelite scheme of coloration as they applied it to her. Palgrave was distressed by "the wan face, blackened lips, and blue-stained bosom of Mr. Millais' figure;" and the *Art Journal*, finding the flesh tones "suggestive of a body rising in grave-clothes, already tainted by corruption," wound up its notice of the painting by beginning to quote "a thing of beauty" and then pointedly suppressing the next four words.67

The controversial moonlight and the prayerful heroine far gone in decay were not forgotten. Five years later (1868), Daniel Maclise, whom no one ever was tempted to call a Pre-Raphaelite by either sympathy or practice, showed his own version of the Keats subject (pl. 336). "Mr.
Millais," said the *Athenaeum*, "with a poetic zest that is given to few, revelled in the glory of the moonlight, painted it, and called the result after Keats's poem; Mr. Maclise painted the very idea of Keats, but would have made that lover of Endymion shudder at the lighting of his picture almost as sharply as he would wince before Mr. Millais' female figure."68 Exhibited by the dealer Gambart at the same time that Maclise’s picture hung at the Royal Academy was another subject from Keats, Holman Hunt's *Isabella and the Pot of Basil*, to which a minor journalist named Bernard Cracroft devoted an entire article in the *Fortnightly Review* that also pursued the nagging question of the artist's obligation to his poetic source. "A miracle of labour and technical resource," the painting was nevertheless "a total miscarriage in conception" before which "the impartial spectator, after he has collected his wits and recovered from his first impressions, [stands] in something like amazement." Specifically:

Mr. Holman Hunt has painted a shrew in her teens before her trials, and so to speak, in the green tree. Keats has painted an exquisitely tender and headlong nature after a long course of heartrending frenzy, and in the fallen and disintegrating fruit. If I were to suggest the type of character that would suit the picture, I should unhesitatingly say that of the celebrated Rachelle when dying of illicit love in *Phaedra*. Mr. Hunt has painted a commonplace, violent-tempered Italian girl, with a vicious eye and a muddy brow. . . . *

His Isabel is quite the girl who later in life might have cut off her living lover's head if he displeased her; quite capable, too, of murdering the brothers who murdered her lover; not by any means the girl whose first thought on dreaming the truth was to recover the darling head, and keep it forever, even in death, instead of being revenged upon the ruthless destroyers of her bliss. Instead of heavenly sweetness breathed upon and devastated by demon's woe, and a paradise of expression, furrowed into waste and wildness and a thousand cross channels, by the hurricane of an overwhelming calamity, we have muscularity run mad, angry health, vacant peevishness, and in the place of the actual effects of storm and tempest in the past, vague possibilities of future ill-temper.69

To feed his readers' indignation, Cracroft devoted two full pages to quoting Keats's "beautiful poem" against Holman Hunt's alleged travesty. The device, of course, was an old one; but by now its availability was proving a doubtful advantage, since experience had shown that it could be used with equal freedom by opposing critics. The *Art Journal* declared that "Mr. Holman Hunt has followed with literal fidelity the words of Keats, and a poem signally pathetic and passionate is here translated into a picture which few can see without emotion."70

But the same reviewer warned, as earlier critics had at least implied in their reception of Pre-Raphaelite art, that the "illusive realism" of such paintings would "exercise more than a legitimate spell over the vulgar public. . . . We . . . warn the spectator against taking even this miracle of manipulation for more than it is worth." The camel's nose was edging under the tent. Pejorative terms like "illusive realism" and "manipulation" could not hide the fact that formal qualities were coming more and more to present their own claims to consideration, and not merely to a "vulgar public" ready to be dazzled by superficial virtuosity while remaining indifferent to content. It might well be that an artist was disloyal to the plain sense of the literary text, and even its spirit, though this always was a matter for fruitless debate; but what of the picture as art, regardless of its source? The insistent question portended, then hastened, the decline of literary art.

*The picture had begun as a portrait of Hunt's wife, the distinctly un-Italian Fanny Waugh.*