THE HISTORY PLAYS

HENRY VI

The three parts of *Henry VI* were seldom performed in any guise. Theophilus Cibber staged his version of Parts Two and Three in 1723, and in 1817 Edmund Kean took the role of Richard, Duke of York in his wretched adaptation of Part Two. "Imagine," said Leigh Hunt of the latter enterprise, "a selection from Raphael's pictures, put together into one picture; or an opera made out of scenes of different operas of Mozart, Paesiello, and Cimarosa. A true painter or musician would laugh in your face at such a proposal. . . . For heaven's sake, let us have no more of such anomalies. Let us see Shakspeare himself, and not a degraded composition of noble limbs, with a piece besides here and there cut from other poets—an eye from poor Chapman, and knee-pan from Webster: for such also is the case with the present!"¹ Not until 1864 was the trilogy staged intact, by an adventurous but obscure company at the minor Surrey Theatre.

Yet no fewer than fourteen pictures in the Boydell Gallery, representing the highest incidence of mediocrity in the whole long series, were taken from the play: a prime instance of the way in which Shakespearean pictorial fashion, in this case dictated by the artists' ambition to scale the heights of history painting, sometimes proceeded independently of a play's theatrical fortunes. Subsequently some twenty-five more were derived from it, as late as 1900–1903, when Edwin Abbey painted the penance of Eleanor, Duchess of Gloucester (Part Two, 2.4) and the death of the king (Part Three, 5.6).

No individual subject was treated more than four times (the number of paintings of Jack Cade's rebellion in Part Two, 4.2 and of Gloucester's death in Part Two, 3.2). The iconographical history of the *Henry VI* plays is mainly interesting for the well-known artists who at one time or another turned their hands to such pictures. Fuseli seems to have been first in the field, with a picture of Warwick taking his oath over Gloucester's body (Part Two, 3.2) (1780–82). Between them, Northcote and Hamilton contributed nine *Henry VI* canvases to the Boydell Gallery. Opie painted two subjects, one of which, the Mother Jourdain conjuring scene (Part Two, 1.4), was also chosen by Matthew W. Peters as one of his contributions to the rival New Shakespeare Gallery.

But the *Henry VI* picture that stirred the most discussion at the time—it was, indeed, one of the two or three most famous paintings in the entire Boydell Gallery—was Reynolds's *The Death of Cardinal Beaufort*, illustrating Warwick's line in Part Two, 3.3, "See how the pangs of death do make him grin." The subject was already a familiar one, having been included in most illustrated editions of the play, but Reynolds added an extra touch by stationing a fiend at the dying cardinal's head as a visible symbol of his guilty conscience. Although some acclaimed the picture generally as Reynolds's finest achievement, the fiend was widely condemned; and Reynolds painted it out before the picture was engraved, though compensating for its removal by intensifying the death's-head grin into which Beaufort's face was contorted. The canvas brought the highest price of all at the Boydell sale in 1805. A number of copies were made of it, and
through numerous re-issues of engravings it became familiar to every reader of Shakespeare.

Fuseli, predictably, could not resist the ghost work in the second part of the trilogy; in 1808, he exhibited at the Royal Academy *Cardinal Beaufort Terrified by the Supposed Apparition of Gloucester* (Part Two, 3.2). Less fearsome than pathetic was the death of Rutland (Part Three, 1.3), a subject undertaken early in his career by Leslie. The British Institution rejected the original canvas; but the Royal Academy hung it (1816), and John Sheepshanks commissioned a copy. Edwin Landseer, then “a curly-headed youngster, dividing his time between Polito’s wild beasts at Exeter Change and the Royal Academy Schools,” modeled for Rutland.

More than half a century later, three successful painters, one at the end of his career and two belonging to a younger generation, took up subjects from *Henry VI*. Sir John Gilbert showed “the poor weak King . . . forced by the ruthless Warwick to look on the dead body of the murdered Gloucester” (RA 1880). William Quiller Orchardson exhibited *Talbot and the Countess of Auvergne* (Part One, 2.3) at the Royal Academy in 1867, and four years later, John Pettie showed his well-known *Scene in the Temple Garden* (pl. 197).

RICHARD III

The prosperous career of *Richard III* in the art world—some fifty paintings are recorded—was launched and sustained by the drama’s steady popularity on the stage. The play as Shakespeare wrote it, to be sure, was seldom performed until the middle of the nineteenth century; Macready’s attempt to restore the text in 1821 was a failure, and though Phelps’s production of the original play in 1845 ran a month, he also later reverted, as did Charles Kean in his spectacular production of 1850, to the adaptation in which *Richard III* had been familiar to audiences since 1700. This was Colley Cibber’s version, a “vile jumble” as Hazlitt called it, which included fragments of *2 Henry VI*, *Henry V*, and *Richard II*, as well as Cibber’s own celebrated brisk line, for which Shakespeare has

197. John Pettie, *Scene in the Temple Garden* (RA 1871) (Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool). One of Pettie’s many paintings from English literature and history. The scene is 1 *Henry VI*, 2. 4: Richard, Duke of York (left), plucks a white rose, the Duke of Somerset (right) a red one, and each calls on his followers to pluck their own. Warwick, one of the background figures, says:

And here I prophesy: this brawl to-day
Grown to this faction in the Temple
garden
Shall send, between the red rose and the white,
A thousand souls to death and deadly night.

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enjoyed undeserved credit, "Off with his head; so much for Bucking-
ham."

Cibber's was the play in which Garrick dazzled his first London au-
dience on 19 October 1741, and it was as Richard III that this most-
painted eighteenth-century actor was most often painted, beginning with
Hogarth's picture produced immediately after his debut (pl. 2). Hayman
(Society of Artists 1760), Fuseli (ca. 1766), Nathaniel Dance (pl. 198), and
Gainsborough (canvas destroyed by fire at the Stratford Town Hall, 1946)
were only the most celebrated of the many artists who seized upon
the subject. Later paintings traced the shifting of the mantle of the stage
Richard III from one famous tragedian to another; portraits of Kemble
in the role (1788) and of Edmund Kean (1814, 1816) were seen at the
annual exhibitions.

Subjects from Richard III served especially the public's voracious ap­
petite for pathos. It was the events described in act 4, scene 3—none are
actually seen on the stage—that were most often depicted: the murder of
the young princes in the Tower, "this piece of ruthless butchery" as it is
called by Tyrell, and their burial.2 Fuseli painted the heads of the mur­
derers Dighton and Forrest about 1780–82. Northcote liked to believe
that his picture of the deed, exhibited in 1786 (pl. 15), had been the
inspiration of the Boydell Gallery; Boydell had bought it, and it was
hanging in his Cheapside home when his nephew hosted the famous
dinner at which the idea of the gallery was first mooted. Boydell ordered a
companion piece from Northcote, The Burial of the Royal Children, to ac­
company the other in the gallery. Northcote produced a third painting
from the play for Boydell, the scene of the princes' meeting the Lord
Mayor (3.1). It is among the worst of all the Boydell commissions, which is
saying a good deal. The princes in the Tower were also painted by Leslie
in 1830 (pl. 83), but his source was not Shakespeare but Thomas
Heywood's The First and Second Partes of King Edward the Fourth (1599).

The androgynous children (they were sometimes played on the stage
by girls) continued to be depicted as "the petted darlings of the day"—
Victoria's day, when the imperatives of "pretty and domestic art" took
precedence over the horror inherent in their story. But the ultimate
trivialization of this famous episode in English history was accomplished
not on canvas but in a program of tableaux vivants—animated can­
vases—the royal family put on at Windsor in 1860, when the living princes posed
as their ill-fated predecessors. One wonders which particular paintings
the children's mentor had in mind. "The two little Boys made a beautiful
picture," wrote the queen in her diary. "Unfortunately Arthur turned his
head away too much." But their father, she recorded, was much pleased.3

Mrs. E. M. Ward treated the subject in 1864—Palgrave thought he had
"seen the principal figure (the young Edward) before in a well-known
work by Paul Delaroche"***—but the most noteworthy of the later pic­
tures of the doomed little princes was Millais's at the Royal Academy in
1878.

The other scene from Richard III that was repeatedly chosen was Rich­
ard's dream, on the eve of Bosworth Field, of the ghosts of the numerous
rivals he had disposed of (5.3). This was the scene in which Garrick was
most often portrayed and it was also painted by Opie, who earlier had
depicted a preceding scene in the play (pl. 11), and twice by Fuseli (RA
1798, 1811).

Pictures from the play continued to be shown to the end of the nine-
teenth century. The “picture of the year” in 1896 was Edwin Abbey's elaborate canvas of Henry VI's funeral procession, with the treacherous, humpbacked new monarch holding out a ring to Lady Anne, the dead king's daughter-in-law, as she walks alone (1.2). The sensation the painting caused encouraged Abbey to paint several more scenes from the history plays in the next few years—a belated and final burst of artistic interest in the Shakespearean sequence.

Of all the pictures from Richard III that are lost, there is a record of one whose disappearance is especially to be regretted: John Nixon's Richard III in a Country Theatre (RA 1786). What echoes did it possess of Hogarth's Strolling Actresses Dressing in a Barn?

KING JOHN

Seldom performed today, King John appears often in the annals of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century London stage, a fact that explains in part, at least, its popularity with artists; some thirty-five pictures from it are recorded. Across the years a splendid succession of tragic actors played King John, and an equally distinguished series of actresses assumed the sympathetic role of Constance. Charles Kemble's production at Covent Garden in 1823, with sets and costumes by the antiquarian James Robinson Planche, was so laden with “authentic” details that the whole play seems to have consisted of a series of old engravings, monumental effigies, and illuminated manuscripts brought to life. Significantly, almost half of the paintings were produced after this year.

The only scene that was painted more than two or three times was 4.1, in which the king's nephew, Arthur, pleads with Hubert de Burgh not to burn out his eyes. Fuseli's version appeared at the Society of Artists in 1775, and Alexander Runciman produced his five years later (pl. 199). Northcote painted the subject for Boydell, at whose sale in 1805 the painting was bought by Miss Linwood, the celebrated maker and exhibitor of needlework copies of famous paintings, who used it as a model for one of her next productions. The subject was also one of the two from the

199. Alexander Runciman, Hubert and Arthur (1780) (National Gallery of Scotland). Like contemporary paintings of the Princes in the Tower, this version of Prince Arthur and the sadistic Hubert (King John, 4. 1) sought to evoke horror through the use of a child. The subject was still viable as late as 1882: see pl. 84.
play that John Opie painted for the New Shakespeare Gallery; the other showed the earlier scene of young Arthur being taken prisoner on the battlefield (3.2). George Henry Harlow's treatment (pl. 200), was denounced by Hazlitt: "the greatest piece of coxcombrity and absurdity we remember to have seen. We do not think that any one who pleases has a right to paint a libel on Shakespeare." Subsequent repetitions of the subject relieved it of much of its inherent drama. By the time William F. Yeames came to paint it (pl. 84), all the Spectator could say, with a yawn, of his version was that it "tells its story plainly and unmistakably, and asks nothing from the spectator but a tacit acquiescence in the interest of its story."^2

RICHARD II

The pictorial record of Richard II, containing no more than a dozen items, is as scanty as its dramatic one. The play was seldom performed in the eighteenth century. Edmund Kean took the title role in his own production in 1815, and Macready, who had played it as a youth in the provinces, resumed it for a couple of performances just before he retired. The play was represented by four pictures in the Boydell Gallery and by one (Northcote's Death of John of Gaunt) in the New Shakespeare Gallery. Two years later (pl. 201), Wheatley painted the death of Richard II.

The record is virtually blank for the next sixty years. A painting of John of Gaunt's dying interview with Richard (2.1) was shown at the Royal Academy in 1852. One of the few other paintings related to the play was Sir John Gilbert's The Deposition of Richard II, exhibited "rich in colour, gold embroideries and damask" at the Royal Academy in 1876.

HENRY IV

Part One of Shakespeare's most popular history play had been constantly performed ever since the Restoration. Betterton was a famous Hotspur, and when he aged out of that part, he played Falstaff with equal success. Part Two was much less popular in both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a relativity mirrored in art; there were roughly two paintings from Part One to every one from Part Two. But still, there was Falstaff in both parts.

The source of at least 115 paintings, Henry IV occupies a special position in the evolution of British art, because it helped undermine history painting as the most elevated, and thus the most solemn, form of art. To those who had the gift of prophecy, its potential subversiveness might have been read in the fact that it alone, of the several "Henry" plays, had been the subject of more than two or three paintings before Boydell enlisted his company of artists to glorify history painting by way of Shakespeare. To be sure, it included various staple themes of history painting—statecraft, political conspiracy, battles, personal heroism. But these were not the themes that most artists chose. They concentrated from the outset on the elements of the play that were not "historical"—neither found in the written sources nor, because of their nature, admissible in history painting—but instead were dramatic embellishments or outright farcical inventions. With the presence of Falstaff, the story of the conscience-haunted monarch and his wastrel but eventually kingly son acquired in art, as it had in the Shakespearean theater, an extra dimension, so strong an element of comedy that its genuinely historical qualities were subordinated
to the imagined plot of a gross old knight who had practiced impartially and with great gusto most of the seven deadly sins. When Falstaff took over a segment of English history in the art exhibitions, history painting could no longer be regarded with unmixed seriousness; cheerfulness, to say nothing of sheer exuberant riot, kept breaking in.

Falstaff was the most popular comic character on the English stage from Dryden’s time onward, but the critical conception of him drastically changed in the course of the eighteenth century. Along with Sir Roger de Coverley, he was the earliest model of the “amiable humorist” type that was defined, shaped, and admired as neoclassic ideals of character gradually shaded into new Romantic ones. To Dryden, he had been undoubtedly funny in his cowardice, buffoonery, and appetites but also undeniably base. From the middle of the eighteenth century, however, Falstaff was completely reinterpreted. Even Dr. Johnson, to whom he remained contemptible, conceded that his good humor redeemed him to a certain

201. Francis Wheatley, *The Death of Richard II* (1795) (Forbes Magazine Collection). The violent climax of Richard II (5. 5). An unusual subject for Wheatley to undertake, because his Greuze-like style was better fitted for lighter scenes, such as the thirteen he painted for Boydell from Shakespeare’s comedies and romances (pl. 180).
extent. In 1777, Maurice Morgann, in one of the century's most influential essays in Shakespearean criticism, devoted two hundred pages to discovering his virtues, which, to Morgann, far outweighed his numerous vices, as they did to Hazlitt as well. "Falstaff's wit," said Hazlitt in an appreciation that did much to shape the Victorians' conception of the fat rogue's character, "is an emanation of a fine constitution; an exuberance of good-humour and good-nature; an overflowing of his love of laughter and good-fellowship; a giving vent to his heart's ease, and over-contentment with himself and others."

This is also the Falstaff who figures in painting. The artist's task was to overlook or at least mitigate the gluttony and coarseness and convey instead a clear and dominant impression of the character's wit: to translate Shakespeare's characterization into a kind of graphic humor acceptable to a middle-class audience with narrow and worrisome notions of personal morality and decorum. Falstaff could not be portrayed as an alcoholic, however jolly, or as a patron of whores, or as a serious threat to the stability of the kingdom through his domination of Prince Hal. Whatever lesser sins he was guilty of had to be defused by attributing to him an all-excusing geniality. There was the further difficulty that much of Falstaff's dramatic appeal lay in his verbal wit, which could not be transferred to canvas. Thus artists had somehow to depict an outsize but mute farceur, his sheer physical charm somehow obscuring his flirtation with sheer viciousness, a sufficiently respectable character to be admitted to the Victorian parlor. It was not a feat that every artist could manage, as reviewers repeatedly observed.

Falstaff starred in Henry IV paintings from the beginning. In 1728, Hogarth showed him reviewing his recruits; and about ten years later, Philip Mercier pictured him twice. One of the supper boxes at Vauxhall Gardens contained a painting by Hayman of the scene in which Hal confronts him with evidence of his late deplorable behavior at Gad's Hill. In 1746, Marcellus Laroon the younger painted Falstaff, tankard at the ready beside him, ridiculing Bardolph's incandescent nose (Part One, 3.3) (pl. 202).

No fewer than thirteen pictures from the two parts of the play were in the Boydell Gallery, including seven by Smirke. His version of the robbery at Gad's Hill was "much approved of," wrote Farington, the artist's friend, in his diary. In another picture, Smirke showed the soon-to-be-robbed carriers in the Rochester Inn yard before daybreak, a crude attempt at Dutch chiaroscuro; but the subject proved not to be very popular, and only two or three subsequent treatments are recorded.

Instead, in the long run the favorite Falstaff subjects were of two kinds: the various uproarious moments at the Boar's Head Tavern in both Parts One and Two, and Falstaff's ragged regiment. Only one painting from the first tavern scene (Part One, 1.2) is recorded and that a relatively late one, William Quiller Orchardson's picture (RA 1868) of Falstaff's exit near the end of the scene. The next tavern scene (2.4) was represented a dozen times, least dramatically by Smirke in his Boydell version, a conventional group of drinkers with Falstaff in the foreground.* Three episodes were depicted. The earliest, Falstaff's fabulous narration of the late proceedings at Gad's Hill, was one of George Clint's three Shakespearean subjects at the Royal Academy in 1833 (pl. 104). It is a tableau worthy of a temperance hotel. Hal's and Poins's expressions, the slightest hint of incredulity on one face and an equally faint smile on the other, do not

*By an irony in the history of art migration, the original canvas ended up at Bob Jones University, South Carolina, where drink is anathema.
suggest that they are deeply involved in Falstaff's lusty performance, nor indeed that they care very much one way or another.

The next movement of the scene, "Falstaff's cowardice detected," was, as we saw above, portrayed by Hayman and possibly one or two others. The third movement, Falstaff's and Hal's *lèse majesté* as the old reprobate assumes the role of Hal's father, the king, in a mock parental interview, was the subject of half a dozen paintings, the best known of which was commissioned from Leslie (RA 1851). "Grimace, sensuality, and coarseness have too often made up the painter's embodiment of Falstaff," commented the *Athenaeum*, "but Mr. Leslie finds another reading" that consisted primarily of shifting the onus of disreputability from Falstaff to his companions: "The parties to the group here represented [Poins, Peto, Gadshill, and Bardolph] certainly justify the worldly castigation which the fat humourist inflicts on the Prince's associates. They are the scape-graces of the time."

The next tavern scene (3.3) accounted for some eight or ten paintings, most of which, illustrating Falstaff's vivid description of Bardolph's flaming nose, showed the fat knight and his companion together.

In Part Two, the chief Boar's Head scene is 2.4, presenting the swaggering silliness of Ancient Pistol and the earthy endearments of Doll Tarrants. A dozen pictures illustrated one or the other. The latter was a delicate subject for nineteenth-century artists. Fuseli's version for Boydell had not evaded the plain Shakespearean sense of the moment; there was something unblushingly Rowlandsonian in his portrayal of Doll on Falstaff's lap. One wonders whether Haydon's lost painting of the same scene, exhibited at the Egyptian Hall in 1832, modified the pose somewhat in deference to the growing pre-Victorian fussiness about such matters. When Augustus Egg came to paint a moment in the scene (RA 1840), he merely had Dame Quickly place a sisterly arm around Falstaff's shoulder.

203. Edward Bird, *Falstaff* (dated 1807) (Bristol Museum and Art Gallery). The "amiable humorist" confronted by a swashbuckling Ancient Pistol (2 *Henry IV*, 2. 4). The artist was a drawing master at Bristol who first exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1809. After his election to the Academy, he served briefly as court painter to Queen Charlotte.
The other favorite subject from *Henry IV* was Falstaff’s ragged regiment, or rather his two regiments: the one he describes to the audience in Part One (4.2), a motley crowd of jail birds, vagrants, and cripples, and the reluctant warriors—Feeble, Bulcalf, Mouldy, and the rest—whom he recruits with the assistance of Justice Shallow in Part Two (3.2). (Paintings of which only the titles survive may have illustrated either of these two passages, although the likelihood is that most came from the latter.) In 1761 and 1765, Hayman produced two versions of the subjects, one now at Dublin and the other at Birmingham (pl. 204). From this early time onward, Falstaff’s draft-board interview was a favorite with painters.
Thomas Durno’s Boydell picture placed Falstaff in a throne-like chair, thus not only recalling the scene in Part One in which Falstaff, acting the King, used a tavern chair for his throne, but perhaps parodying history paintings that depicted real monarchs on their thrones. The version by John Gilbert (pl. 205) drew critics’ fire for what they considered the repulsiveness of all the characters. One reviewer surmised that the artist had not given himself “time to glance over his text, much less to study the characters. Falstaff,” he asserted, “is a mere vulgar reveller, with no humour lurking in his eye, no trace of intellect in his countenance; and Feeble, who is under examination, is almost in the last stage of senility, his bent knees shaking under him, quite unlike one who, if he would not fight, could ‘run off swiftly’ in a retreat.” The Shakespearean text was always there to confront the negligent painter.

The scene between Hotspur and his wife (Part One, 2.3), an agreeable mixture of domestic comedy and earnestness, was treated by some ten artists in quite contrasting moods. For Boydell, Smirke put Lady Percy in the conventional pose of kneeling supplication, while her dashingly mustached husband stood with sword resting against his foot. Painting the scene in 1836 for Heath’s Gallery, A. E. Chalon chose instead to represent (mutely) the persiflage between the two. A picture at the Royal Academy in 1855 illustrated Lady Percy’s description of Hotspur fighting battles in his sleep, as she tenderly watched over him. The artist added two details absent from Shakespeare: at the bedside also was the Percys’ little boy, riding on the back of a deerhound, and his father wore armor underneath his yellow night robe.

Another scene depicting the most private moments of the protagonists is that in Part Two (4.5) in which Prince Hal tries on his father’s crown for size in the presence of the sleeping King, who when he awakens accuses Hal of wishing to usurp the throne. Smirke painted it three times for Boydell, and Woodmason’s rival Shakespeare Gallery had Wheatley’s painting of the same moment. J. C. Horsley won a £200 prize at the Westminster Hall competition of 1846 for a huge portrayal of Hal’s taking the crown.

When artists selected from Henry IV such conventional history-painting subjects as battlefield heroism and political deliberations or dissensions, once again they focused on the largely unhistorical, “literary” elements in the Shakespearean source. The rebellion of the dissident lords was seen in terms of the personal enmity between Hotspur and Glendower (Part One, 3.1); in 1784, Fuseli painted John Philip Kemble as Hotspur with the conspirators (pl. 206). Hotspur’s feats at the battle of Holmedon, as described by Westmoreland early in Part One (1.1), went unrepresented; instead, painters chose the scene Hotspur describes in act 1, scene 3, his encounter with the pouncet-box lord picking his fastidious way among the corpses after the battle.

With but one or two exceptions, only Boydell’s artists showed any interest in portraying the last scenes of the two parts. John Francis Rigaud contributed to the Shakespeare Gallery a picture of a slim if not effeminate Prince Hal, his armor-enclosed thighs suggesting an ingénue in a breeches part, standing over the downed Hotspur, with Falstaff on the ground, half hidden behind him. Smirke showed the false victor Falstaff solus, with the body of Hotspur on the ground instead (pl. 208). Only two pictures represented moments in the last scene of Part Two (5.5): Smirke’s of a bareheaded Falstaff clutching the top of his belly in an...
S. J. E. Jones, *Hotspur and the Fop* (British Institution 1829) (Royal Shakespeare Theatre Picture Gallery ©). The encounter Hotspur describes in *1 Henry IV*, 1. 3. The painting is a typical example of the pot-boiling literary picture. The artist exhibited fairly often at all three of the annual shows.

Robert Smirke, *Falstaff and the Dead Body of Hotspur* (undated) (Royal Shakespeare Theatre Picture Gallery ©). Among the seven pictures from the two parts of *Henry IV* that Smirke painted for Boydell was one representing this scene (Part One, 5. 4). This painting, however, is a quite different composition. Like the Shakespearean scene it illustrates, it is a travesty of the heroic mode—an invincible warrior triumphant over the body of his adversary.

It was from the life of Henry V (though not from Shakespeare’s dramatization) that the first known paintings from English history were taken: William Kent’s three pictures of Henry at Agincourt, meeting the King of France, and marrying the French princess, commissioned by Queen Caroline in 1729–30. *Henry V* likewise was the first of Shakespeare's history plays to engage an artist; Hayman painted *Montjoy...Demands of Henry Whether He Will Compound for His Ransom* (4. 3) for the Prince's Pavilion at Vauxhall shortly before 1745. In 1776, Andrew van Rysmodyk showed at the Society of Artists the Duke of York dying at Agincourt, supported by the Earl of Exeter. Only two Boydell pictures were from *Henry V*, one, by Westall, showing the King at the gates of Harfleur (3. 3), the other, by Fuseli, of the King telling the conspirators what was afoot (pl. 209). In 1790, at the Royal Academy, a minor artist named Benazeck portrayed a minor actor named Whitfield in what must be one of the most negligible roles ever featured in theatrical painting, the common soldier Michael Williams.

The play’s fortunes and, as a consequence, artists’ interest in it, revived somewhat in the early nineteenth century. Macready first performed it in 1815, and gave it the full spectacular treatment, complete with a moving diorama, in 1839. Charles Kean’s production in 1859, the most lavish of all, ran for eighty-four nights. Fresh paintings, accounting for most of the
recorded total of twenty or so, accompanied or recalled these revivals. The heroic pictures usually depicted Henry V visiting the bivouac before Agincourt; Sir John Gilbert painted the scene as late as 1884. The comic scenes, slightly more numerous, favored the quarrel between Pistol, Nym, Bardolph, and Dame Quickly (2.1). In 1839, the Scottish painter Alexander Christie sought to have the best of both worlds, comic genre and history, when he painted Nym on the field of Agincourt. But the Henry V painting that one would most wish to see was a canvas that never existed except in the errant fingers (and lubrious mind?) of a typesetter engaged on a volume of Algernon Graves's record of art sales (1918–21). According to this source, a painting by Gilbert that was sold in 1877 was entitled Pistol and Nymph: in its bizarre way, an attractive conceit.

HENRY VIII

Of the history plays, only the two parts of Henry IV exceeded Henry VIII in the number of pictures they inspired. Although Fuseli’s Queen Katherine’s Vision (RA 1781) was virtually the only pictorial treatment before the seven commissioned by Boydell, in the ensuing century some fifty paintings were taken from the play. In marked contrast to Henry VI, we have here an illustration of the way in which the theatrical popularity of the play fed interest in it as a subject for art. In the wake of Betterton’s productions at the beginning of the century, it had often been revived, chiefly on account of its grand ceremonial scenes; the coronation procession as performed at Drury Lane in 1762 required 140 extras. J. P. Kemble’s production (1788) initiated his family’s long identification with the play, Kemble himself playing first Cromwell and later Wolsey, with Mrs. Siddons as Katherine, one of her greatest roles.

Henry VIII boasted no Falstaff nor indeed much comedy of any sort, and it had no romantic love theme; but its dramatic situations and its pageantry combined to recommend it to theatergoers and art lovers alike
across the whole of the nineteenth century. It was among the favorite plays of two quintessential Victorian narrative painters, C. R. Leslie and Sir John Gilbert. Leslie's interest in the fortunes of the unhappy queen dated from student days at the Academy schools. As a token of his election to the academy at the age of thirty-two, he portrayed the opening moment of act 3, scene 1, when Queen Katherine bids her waiting woman "Take thy lute, wench, my soul grows sad with troubles. . . ." In all, Leslie painted half a dozen pictures of Katherine. At the height of his fame, he painted two subjects from Henry VIII for Brunel's Shakespeare room. The first (1849) showed the moment when Henry reveals himself to Wolsey at the masque in York Place (1.4), and the other, exhibited at the Royal Academy the following year, the scene (4.2) in which Katherine receives Capuchius, by whom she sends her farewell to the king.

To a degree unmatched in art from the other history plays with the possible exception of Henry IV, painters' interest in Henry VIII was concentrated in two or three scenes, to various moments of which they returned after time. The earliest of these was act 3, scene 1, which after the waiting woman's song in the first minutes develops into the passage in which the queen is brought to judgment by Cardinals Wolsey and Campion. In all the major productions of the play, from John Philip Kemble's to those of Henry Irving and Beerbohm Tree, this was one of the great scenes. Half a dozen portrayals of it in art were to be seen in the course of the nineteenth century, of which at least three survive: George Henry Harlow's (pl. 154), Henry Andrews's (pl. 155), and Henry Nelson O'Neil's (pl. 108).

Equally popular with artists was act 4, scene 2, the scene containing both Griffith's description of the death of Wolsey and the dying Queen Katherine's dream of the troop of angels awaiting her in heaven. Wolsey's death was repeatedly pictured, by Westall for the Boydell Gallery among others. Prince Albert commissioned the same subject from Charles Cope, and near the end of his career, Gilbert included it among his several paintings from the history plays.

The queen's vision was another of the play's great moments in performance.1 Kean's production, which ran for a record-breaking one hundred consecutive nights in 1855, was acclaimed for the long "panoramic procession" in the fifth act, which showed the journey of the lord mayor and aldermen from the City to Greenwich Palace for the christening of Elizabeth, and the "correctness and splendour" of its tableaux. The words of praise are those of the reigning Queen, who saw it on 5 June; she was especially impressed by "Queen Katherine's dream, with the angels descending on a sunbeam, waving palm branches and holding out to her a crown of the same."* It is conceivable that the established fame of the scene in easel painting inspired Kean and his predecessors to these heights of pictorial splendor. Fuseli had painted at least two versions, for the Royal Academy exhibition of 1781 and Macklin's Poet's Gallery; Henry Howard had exhibited his in 1832, and Henry O'Neil still others in 1848 and 1853. It was only to be expected that artists would, in turn, immediately exploit the fame of Kean's staging. Two paintings of the scene were hung at the British Institution the next year, and another at the Royal Academy in 1857.

One other theme in the play was repeatedly chosen: the quarrel between Wolsey and Buckingham (1.2) and Wolsey's disgrace when his

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*Lewis Carroll left a rapturous description of the scene, too long to quote here. It began: "But oh, that exquisite vision of Queen Catherine! I almost held my breath to watch; the illusion is perfect, and I felt as if in a dream all the time it lasted. It was like a delicious reverie, or the most beautiful poetry" (Diaries of Lewis Carroll, ed. R. L. Green [New York, 1954], 1:54).
duplicity is revealed (3.2). Solomon Hart, for example, painted the earlier moment (RA 1834); and John Pettie was among the half-dozen, once again beginning with Westall, who painted Wolsey’s disgrace (RA 1869). The Wolsey-Buckingham plot, however, was the special province of Gilbert, whose successive representations of it were landmarks in his long career. He painted Wolsey’s disgrace in 1845 and again—unless it was the same picture reexhibited—in 1849. His version of Wolsey’s entrance in act 1, scene 1, was exhibited in 1862 (pi. 39). But Gilbert painted his most celebrated picture from *Henry VIII*—this from the opening of act 1, scene 2—at the end of his long career as an illustrator: *Cardinal Wolsey Going in Procession to Westminster Hall* (pl. 210), better known as *Ego et Rex Meus*.