THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

DEFOE

As a tale for children, Robinson Crusoe was as enduringly popular as that other standard book for the chimney corner, The Pilgrim's Progress. The first of innumerable editions (1719) had an illustration showing the shipwrecked mariner in the home-sewn costume of skins in which he would be clothed whenever he reappeared in engravings and paintings. The plates engraved from Stothard's designs for Stockdale's edition in 1790 were reused, time after time, throughout the next century. An edition of 1831 contained thirty-eight wood engravings by George Cruikshank, and nine years later a London publisher issued an English edition of the current Paris one, with notable illustrations by “Grandville” (Jean Ignace Isidore Gérard). This last, however, for some reason failed to sell; published at sixteen shillings, it was remaindered at a mere five shillings.

But, like The Pilgrim's Progress, Robinson Crusoe was for a long time not taken seriously by artists other than those commissioned by publishers. It became a subject of exhibited paintings only in the first decade of the nineteenth century, when Stothard showed his Robinson Crusoe's Long Boat at the Royal Academy (1808). The delay was due almost certainly to the low repute Defoe's narrative had as a work of literature; no book so irremediably identified with the reading fare of the humble was entitled to the dignity of easel art. But when boys who had read and reread the well-worn family copy of Robinson Crusoe became prosperous men and a few of them entered the market for household art, their fancy in status symbols naturally ran to paintings that depicted the subjects of fondly remembered engravings and, by no means incidentally, provided object lessons in the valuable virtue of self-help, that cornerstone of bourgeois prudential morality. The next recorded Crusoe painting following Stothard's was the work of an artist seldom associated with this kind of literary subject, William Etty, whose Robinson Crusoe Wrecked on a Desert Island Returning Thanks to God for His Deliverance (Etty's own title, abbreviated in practice to The Shipwrecked Mariner) was shown at the British Institution in 1832. Three years later, Alexander Fraser showed Crusoe Instructing His Man Friday (inside the hut, accompanied by Crusoe's goats, cat, and parrot, and surrounded by numerous utensils and implements testifying to the sailor's manual ingenuity). In 1845, the same artist exhibited at the Royal Academy a scene illustrating Crusoe's complacent statement, “I frequently sat down to meat with thankfulness . . .” surrounded again by his animal companions.

Some twenty-five pictures in all are recorded, more than half of them appearing between 1835 and 1863. (Two paintings shown in the seventies—Robert Collinson's Absorbed in Robinson Crusoe [RA 1871] and A. F. Patten's Reading Robinson Crusoe: The Footprint on the Sand [RA 1878]—were genre pictures testifying to the story's continuing appeal to young readers.) Besides the subjects already mentioned, artists showed Crusoe reading the Bible, having his last look at the ship, visiting the Spanish wreck and bringing stores from it, imprisoned by the Salee rover, and teaching his parrot to talk—a variety of scenes indeed, considering the brevity of Defoe's veracious narrative. In addition, there were two “factual” Crusoe paintings. One, in 1858, strained a literary connection by
declaring a genre portrait to represent the “last descendant of Alexander Selkirk,” the original of Defoe’s mariner; the other, in 1880, depicted Selkirk’s, alias Crusoe’s, birthplace.

The one other of Defoe’s many works that was illustrated was the Journal of the Plague Year, a tour de force of historical reconstruction by a journalist who never witnessed the events he described. Paul Falconer Poole’s Solomon Eagle Exhorting the People to Repentance, During the Plague of the Year 1665 (pl. 286), though its immediate source was Harrison Ainsworth’s Old St. Pauls, a novel serialized in 1841, was ultimately indebted to the Journal, where the fanatical Eagle appears. The painting caused a sensation when it was hung at the Royal Academy in 1843. Blackwood’s Magazine devoted no fewer than five columns to a review which declared that “there has not been so powerful a picture painted in this country since the days of Sir Joshua Reynolds.” The work was compared, not at all to its disadvantage, with Reynolds’s Ugolino in the Tower and Poussin’s The Plague at Ashdod. Thackeray admired the realistic execution, but raised a practical consideration:

Figures writhe over the picture blue and livid with the plague—some are dying in agony—some stupid with pain. You see the dead-cart in the distance; and in the midst stands naked Solomon, with blood-shot eyes and wild maniacal looks, preaching death, woe, and judgment. Where should such a piece hang? It is too gloomy for a hospital, and surely not cheerful enough for a dining-room. It is not a religious picture, that would serve to decorate the walls of a church. A very dismal, gloomy conventicle might, perhaps, be a suitable abode for it; but would it not be better to tempt the public with something more good-humoured? Thackeray’s fear that the picture was unsalable was justified, at least in the short run. Despite the critical acclaim and the reasonable price Poole asked for it, £400, it went unsold at the Academy and then followed the familiar route of such paintings, to the next show at the British Institution. There, or subsequently, it was bought by a picture dealer and seemingly remained in his possession until it was auctioned at Christie’s in 1860 and bought in at twice the original asking price. There seems to be no record of its hanging in a dining room.
SWIFT

One of the earliest urban genre paintings on record is Edward Penny's *Scene from Swift's Description of a City Shower*, shown at the Society of Artists in 1764. Otherwise, all pictures from Swift's works were from a single book, *Gulliver's Travels*. But although the book went through numerous editions in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, unlike those other classics of popular literature, *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *Robinson Crusoe*, it did not have a strong tradition of illustration. No more than four engravings were found in any single edition until the Paris edition of 1838, with 282 illustrations by Grandville, was reissued in London two years later with one less (the episode of Gulliver extinguishing the fire in Lilliput).¹

The most noteworthy paintings from *Gulliver's Travels* were produced early in the book's career in art. These were the four painted by Sawrey Gilpin. (Gilpin's better-known contemporary as an animal painter, George Stubbs, seems never to have taken a subject from Swift's book.) The subjects were *Gulliver Addressing the Houyhnhms, Supposing Them to Be Conjurors; Gulliver Reprimanded and Silenced by His Master, When Describing the Horrors of War; Gulliver, Taking His Final Leave of His Master, the Sorrel Nag, etc., and the Land of the Houyhnhms* (pl. 92); and *Gulliver Describing Fortification to the Horses*. (The first three were exhibited at the Society of Artists, 1768–72, the last-named not until 1808, at the British Institution.) Splendid examples of horseflesh, Gilpin's Houyhnhms bore out Swift's conception of them as admirable exemplars of the virtues and powers of the reason; if the contrast he draws between them and the repulsive man-beast Yahoos was never made specific in art, it was doubtless because no one wished to own pictures of Yahoos.²

In the nineteenth century, critical taste leaned heavily toward the first two books, the voyages to Lilliput and Brobdingnag, which came also to be valued as children's books. Accordingly, in the 1830s several paintings moved Gulliver from the Land of the Houyhnhms to Brobdingnag. The most-discussed of these was Leslie's *Gulliver's Introduction to the Queen of Brobdingnag* (pl. 287), painted for Lord Egremont. Reviewers disapproved of the picture on various grounds. The women, they complained, were portrayed as ordinary English human beings rather than "female ogres, colossal dames," and conversely, Gulliver was not a human being but "a puppet made of wax and wire, bowing at the touch of a showwoman." The wit and satire were lost, said others, who called the subject "intractable" (the *Athenaeum*) and "trivial" (*Fraser's Magazine*).³ Richard Redgrave's picture of another scene in the voyage to Brobdingnag, *Gulliver Exhibited to the Brobdingnag Farmer*, was shown at the British Institution the year after Leslie's picture was hung at the Royal Academy. Only a few *Gulliver* paintings were exhibited after this time, artists turning instead to Swift's life, a subject that was to account for as many pictures, about a dozen, as had his most famous work (see Part One, chapter 7, above).

THE SPECTATOR

No eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century household with any pretension to cultivation was without its leather-bound set of the *Spectator* essays.¹ Literally scores of editions were published, twelve by the time of Steele's death in 1729, twenty in the period 1783–1800 alone. Addison's
and Steele's moral essays, their literary criticism, their pointed but in­
offensive satire of the manners of the leisured class in Queen Anne's day,
and above all their creation of a club of believable type-figures—a busi­
nessman, an army officer, a man-about-town—under the benevolent sov­
eignty of Sir Roger de Coverley, a country gentleman, were as much a
part of the mental furniture of English readers as Shakespeare or Milton.
Prized models of lucid prose, they were set pieces for students of rhetoric
to analyze in behalf of the improvement of their own style; a leading
rhetorician, Hugh Blair, asserted that Addison's chief talent lay in “de­
scribing and painting.” On his first visit to London in 1763, Boswell used
“Mr. Spectator” (unsuccessfully) as a role model, and the
Spectator itself as a guide to the attitudes and activities proper to a gentlemanly Londoner. Dr. Johnson's often-quoted praise was echoed in later generations by
Hazlitt in his lecture on the essayists in The English Comic Writers and by
Macaulay in the Edinburgh Review (1843). “In spite of the vigorous efforts
of modern genius and talent to displace them,” observed an art critic in
1831, “the characters and scenes of Addison still are, and will long remain
to the English public, 'familiar as household words.'”

Some sixty paintings from the Spectator (few from its predecessor, the
Tatler) were exhibited during the nineteenth century, mainly in the 1840s and 1850s, when the taste for the kind of moralized picture suggested by
the character of Sir Roger de Coverley was at its peak. Derived from about
30 out of the original 555 numbers of the Spectator, most of them by
Addison, they had more than that number of subjects—a conspicuous
exception, as was The Pilgrim's Progress, to the general practice whereby a
few passages from a given literary work were painted again and again.
Even so, the Spectator, like The Faerie Queene, contained far more pictorial
opportunities than artists ever availed themselves of.

287. Charles R. Leslie, Gulliver's Introduction to the Queen of Brobdingnag (RA 1835) (Petworth House). Although Gulliver's description of the bodily features of Brobdingnagians seen close-up is explicit enough, he says nothing about how they were dressed. His first readers doubtless envisioned them as wearing contemporary, that is, early Hanoverian costumes. But artists were free to clothe such characters as they wished, and giving the Brobdingnagians costumes commonly associated with pictures from Shakespeare probably gratified the taste of the time.
288. Thomas Stothard, *Sir Roger de Coverley and the Gypsies* (RA 1803) (Victoria & Albert Museum, Crown Copyright). The gypsy reads in Sir Roger’s palm that he has “a widow in his line of life who will be faithful to him and will dream of him that night.” “Ah, master,” she says, “that rogish leer of yours makes a pretty woman’s heart ache; you have not that simper about the mouth for nothing.”

Except for a pair of figure-laden allegorical landscapes by William Williams (SA 1768, RA 1770) representing the procession of the months (*Spectator* 425), and a picture at the Society of Artists (1773) called *The Levee* (Steele, No. 193), paintings from the *Spectator* were not seen at exhibitions until 1803–4, when for some reason there was a sudden spate of them, the majority representing subjects most conformable to the lingering taste for classic tales and fantasies rather than ones with satirical edge. At the Royal Academy in 1803, no fewer than eight paintings came from the *Spectator*. P. J. Loutherbourg depicted the story illustrating Dryden’s lines “O cursed hunger of pernicious gold! / What bands of faith can impious lucre hold!” (Steele, No. 426). Stothard showed three canvases, each on a subject that would be repeated by later artists: *Brunetta and Phyllis* (Steele, No. 80) (pl. 90), *Sir Roger de Coverley and the Gypsies* (No. 130) (pl. 288), and *The Spectator’s Club* (probably No. 1 or 2). Henry Thomson took two subjects from the Oriental tale of Fadlallah (Eustace Budgell, No. 578). Henry Tresham’s contribution was *The Visionary Maratons in the World of Spirits* (No. 56), and Westall showed *Theodosius and Constantia* (No. 164) and *Sapphira Discovering the Murder of Her Husband* (Steele, No. 497).
The next year, the Royal Academy hung three paintings by Singleton: The Cardinal Enraged at the Depositions of His Spy (No. 439), a rendering of Addison's lively sketch of the vociferous "Trunk-maker in the upper gallery" of the playhouse (No. 235), and the annual Persian fair for the disposition of marriageable females, attributed by Steele to Herodotus (No. 511). Westall took The Filial Attention of Fidelia (Steele, No. 449) and Fuseli The Rosicrucian Cavern from No. 379, the work of Budgell.

The ensuing shift in the choice of Spectator subjects was evident in the ones that a minor artist named Thomas Clater picked for the canvases he sent to one or another of the annual exhibitions in the 1830s: Sir Roger de Coverley and the Spectator in Spring Gardens (No. 383); Mrs. Saunter and Her Niece, "fine women" who have reprehensibly fallen into the habit of taking snuff (Steele, No. 344); The Transmigration of Souls Asserted by Will Honeycomb (No. 343); and Sempronias, the Matchmaker (Steele, No. 437).

During the heyday of literary anecdote paintings, Sir Roger de Coverley costarred with Sterne's Uncle Toby: both were exemplars of amiability, upstanding morality, and varying degrees of quirkiness. As early as 1819, Leslie advanced his career with Sir Roger de Coverley Going to Church, Accompanied by the Spectator, painted for a wealthy tobacco importer and exhibited at the Royal Academy.* Near the end of his life, in 1857, he returned to Spectator 112 for Sir Roger de Coverley in Church, commissioned by a patron in Preston.

That other popular Victorian specialist in literary anecdotal art, W. P. Frith, painted scenes from the Spectator several times. In 1847 he exhibited Sir Roger and the Saracen's Head, representing the incident (No. 122) in which an old servant of Sir Roger has his master's head painted for an inn sign. The next year, Frith turned away from Sir Roger, choosing instead The Old Woman Accused of Witchcraft (No. 117), in which humor was replaced by a tense dramatic situation.

Frith eventually returned to Sir Roger in 1870, choosing this time the most popular subject associated with him, his courtship of the beautiful but perverse widow (Steele, No. 113)—a mirror image, in a way, of another famous subject, Sterne's Uncle Toby and the Widow Wadman (pls. 45, 67). Earlier versions of Sir Roger and the widow, by other artists, had been exhibited in 1841, 1847, and 1855.

Other artists showed Sir Roger hunting with Mr. Spectator (Budgell, No. 116), with whom he also visits Westminster Abbey (No. 329), sending the remainder of his meal at Spring Gardens to the wooden-legged waterman who had ferried him there (No. 383), and his and Will Honeycomb's little adventure with a "creature of the town," Sukey (Steele, No. 410).

Interspersed with these pictures, especially after the middle of the century, were a number of comedy-of-manners pieces bearing an affinity to the many portrayals of the rape of Belinda's lock. The delightful number (102) on "the exercise of the fan" was represented at least three times, as was Clarinda's diary of five days in the crowded and vacuous life of a fashionable ennuyée (No. 323).

GAY

Hogarth's picture (pl. 1) of a scene from the first production of Gay's The Beggar's Opera in 1728 was, after Le Piper's Hudibras designs, one of the very first paintings made of a subject from English literature. The play was the most popular of the century (more than a thousand perfor-
George Stubbs, *The Farmer’s Wife and the Raven* (RA 1782) (Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight). Gay’s *Fable* 37. One of the very few literary subjects to be realized in an unusual medium—enamel on a ceramic tablet.

Performances are recorded down to 1800), and as a full evening’s entertainment or as an afterpiece, it was constantly revived down to the 1880s. One out-of-the-ordinary revival occurred in 1816, when in a Covent Garden performance starring the comedian Charles Mathews, whose benefit night it was, the characters, according to the advertisements, were dressed “as on the first representation of the play in 1727[8], and taken from Hogarth’s celebrated picture." Though the number of paintings *The Beggar’s Opera* inspired was not commensurate with its enduring popularity on the stage, scenes and characters from it appeared at least ten times down to 1875. Among them were several female portraits labeled Lucy Lockit or, oftener, Polly Peachum: Hogarth painted the originator of the latter role, Lavinia Fenton, about 1734.

Gay’s *Fables* (1727) were even better known to the public at large. Some 350 editions appeared down to the end of the nineteenth century, including several with illustrations by such artists as Bewick (1779) and Blake (1794). The dozen or so oil paintings from the *Fables* recorded down to 1866 were counterparts of the book illustrations, and in some instances the painting may have been the model for the illustration, or vice versa. George Stubbs’s *The Farmer’s Wife and the Raven* (pl. 289), one of his few literary paintings, is thought to have been copied from a design in an earlier edition by one of his predecessors as an animal painter, John Wooton. The *Fables* had a marked appeal to artists in this line. Among Landseer’s early successes was *The Monkey Who Had Seen the World* (RA 1827), a typical Landseer exercise in satirical anthropomorphism in which a monkey learns the ways of the world by serving an eighteenth-century lady of fashion. James Ward, one of Stubbs’s successors as an equine specialist, exhibited *The Council of Horses*, from the *Fables*, in 1848.

Eight or ten pictures were inspired by Gay’s *The Shepherd’s Week* (1714), a burlesque of Ambrose (“Namby-Pamby”) Philips’s attempts at pastoral verse that, divested of its original satirical thrust, was admired as a representation of native country life. Two pictures, exhibited at the Royal
Academy half a century apart, by Opie (1803) and one George Wells (1852), represented the same subject from the fourth pastoral: pretty Hobnelia following the May Day custom of predicting the future by watching the movements of a snail ("I search'd to find a snail, / That might my secret lover's name reveal . . . "). It was quite a reach from Captain Macheath, as depicted by such artists as Gilbert Stuart Newton (RA 1826) and Henry Liverseege (BR 1831), to domesticated Theocritan shepherdesses, but literary art could embrace them with equal enthusiasm.

RAMSAY

Allan Ramsay's *The Gentle Shepherd* (1725) was a pastoral comedy, set in the Cromwellian period, which, reportedly at the request of the pupils at the Haddington Grammar School, he converted into a ballad opera in 1728, the year Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* was produced in London. From that time to the end of the eighteenth century, except for a few years in the 1740s, it was constantly being performed somewhere in the British Isles; and after a fresh burst of popularity late in the century, an abbreviated version continued in the repertory as an afterpiece. Originally written in the Scots tongue, it was adapted in a number of English versions beginning with Theophilus Cibber's *Patie and Peggy, or The Fair Foundling* (1730). Together with *The Beggar's Opera*, Ramsay's play forged a lasting link between the stage and popular balladry; the one drew its songs from those heard in the London streets, the other from folk material.1

In addition to the frequent revivals on the stage, the play was printed in many cheap editions, some of which circulated among the Scottish peasantry. Thus the story (involving secret parentage, the return in disguise of an exiled landowner, and two pairs of rural lovers) and the chief characters (the lovers themselves, Patie and Peggy, and Roger and Jenny, along with old shepherds and a supposed witch) were well known to a large public. Between 1750, the date of the first recorded artistic treatment, by Paul Sandby (pl. 290), and the end of the nineteenth century, more than

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1 Paul Sandby, *Scene from "The Gentle Shepherd"* (1750) (Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum). One of the earliest paintings to represent a scene in a popular contemporary work of literature. The setting, a Scottish shepherd's cottage, contrasts strongly with the upper-middle-class interiors seen in Higmore's and Hayman's pictures from Richardson's novels (pls. 4, 5) and anticipates the genre scenes from humble life derived from *The Gentle Shepherd* and Burns's poems that Wilkie would paint many years later (pls. 44, 135, 291, 308).
forty paintings depicted scenes or characters from *The Gentle Shepherd* itself or from one of the adaptations—more than came from the entire works of Chaucer, Defoe, Swift, Richardson, or Fielding, and as many as were drawn from Bunyan or Pope. Along with Burns's poems and Scott's poems and novels, Ramsay's play both stimulated and reflected the interest in Scottish themes that was a phenomenon of early nineteenth-century British painting.

Not surprisingly, many of the painters from Ramsay were themselves Scotsmen. In 1788, the warm reception of David Allan's series of aquatints illustrating *The Gentle Shepherd* encouraged him to proceed with his well-known watercolors of Scottish rural life and scenes, an early landmark in the history of Scottish art. David Wilkie made sketches from the play while he was still a student at the Trustees' Academy in Edinburgh, one of them portraying the same scene (3.2) that had been Sandby's subject in 1750. The two most famous pictures from the play were by Wilkie: *Roger slighted by Jenny*, from act 1, scene 1 (pl. 291), and *The Cottage Toilette*, from act 5, scene 2 (pl. 135). Later on, Alexander Johnston, who had come to London with a letter of introduction to Wilkie and made his own reputation as a genre and historical painter, showed two pictures from *The Gentle Shepherd* (RA 1840 and 1849).

**Pope**

If the sheer diversity of a poet's personal and literary ties with art had any bearing on the frequency with which artists drew upon his works, Alexander Pope should have been the most favored of all. As a young man, he studied painting with the fashionable Kneller-trained portraitist Charles Jervas, in whose studio-home he lived for a year or more; he knew many of the leading painters and connoisseurs of his day; he sat for his portrait more frequently than any contemporary (the leading authority on Pope portraiture counts eighty-one distinct "types")*; his aesthetic principles were grounded in painting, and he was a leading advocate of *ut pictura poesis*; his original poems and translations are pervaded by pictorialism; and another student of Pope has said—perhaps forgetting Leigh Hunt on Spenser—that "he was, apparently, the first of our poets to explore the possibilities of colour composition in poetry, and the first whose verse might often be called a gallery of pictures in colour."2

Whatever forms it took, however, Pope's pictorialism did not lead to artists' selecting a wide range of subjects from his poetry, as they did from Spenser's. Their perennial choice was limited to a single poem, *The Rape of the Lock*. But this at least was a fairly durable source of literary paintings. Some forty-five pictures are recorded, distributed with unusual evenness across a hundred years. Unaffected by the vicissitudes of Pope's critical reputation, which in turn depended on succeeding generations' estimate of his private character,*3 the lighthearted story of Mistress Arabella Femor and her stolen lock of hair, complete with attendant nymphs and other airy beings, never lost its appeal to artists and their clientele.4 Its attractions were as numerous as its author's affinities with the art of painting. It offered a chance to paint pastiches of the many classic treatments of the toilet of Venus, localizing in an English setting the air of indolent voluptuousness that always characterized such paintings. It likewise afforded an occasion to oblige the Victorian taste for fairy pictures (the sylphs and gnomes), costume pieces, and such mild satire of social vanities and foibles as the age tolerated.

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*Pope seems to have been as zealous as Garrick to disseminate pictures of himself, though for somewhat different reasons. As early as 1792, Voltaire wrote that although "the picture of the prime minister [Walpole] hangs over the chimney of his own closet... I have seen that of Mr. Pope in twenty noblemen's houses" (William K. Wimsatt, *The Portraits of Alexander Pope* [New Haven, Conn., 1965], pp. xv, xvii).
In Victorian times, portraits of Belinda came to the galleries equipped with the inevitable motto “A heavenly image in the glass appears.” Not quite a Keepsake beauty, she was still a sentimental heroine of some consequence. But by no means all, and perhaps not even most, of the paintings from *The Rape of the Lock* depicted her at her toilet. The poem contains some fifteen tableaux, and it is likely that some of the paintings listed simply as being from the poem represented these, in addition to the ones bearing explicit titles.

Among the earliest Belinda pictures was one (ca. 1776) that the authority on *Rape of the Lock* illustrations has declared to be “the most lubricious” of all.\(^*\) It was painted by Matthew William Peters, who had something of a reputation as the producer of pictures unfit to be viewed by respectable women in a public gallery. He became a member of the Royal Academy in 1777, the year he displayed one such painting (*A Woman in Bed*); and five years later, supposedly for prudential rather than penitential reasons, he took holy orders. From 1784 to 1790, he was the Academy’s chaplain; and though he resigned both that office and his membership, he continued to paint and exhibit, his subjects now being suitably religious.\(^6\) A decade or so later, Fuseli painted *Belinda’s Awakening*, a picture identified until recently—a fairly impressive error—as *Queen Mab*. Other illustrators of *The Rape of the Lock* in these years included George Morland, whose *Belinda Billet Doux* was engraved in 1794, and William Hamilton. In the next generation, Belinda was ushered into the gift books by such specialists in keepsake art as Eliza Sharpe. Gilbert Stuart Newton, one of the most promising painters of the moment, was reported by Washington Irving to have “in hand” a picture of Belinda contemplating herself in the glass; but if it was completed, it seems to have disappeared.\(^7\)

Despite the great surge of literary paintings between 1830 and 1850, *Rape of the Lock* pictures were then produced at a constant rather than an accelerated pace. For some reason, the rate picked up on the fifties. Of the eight or so examples exhibited in that decade, the most discussed was Leslie’s *Sir Plume Demands the Restoration of the Lock* (pl. 149). “Very dingy

\(^{291}\) David Wilkie, *Roger Slighted by Jenny* (1823) (National Gallery of Scotland). A familiar genre subject, the rustic serenade. The appreciative attitudes of the two listeners, Jenny and Peggy, do not reflect the actual situation described in Roger’s lines in Ramsay’s *The Gentle Shepherd* (1. 1):

My Bawty is a cur I dearly like,
Even while he fawn’d, she [Jenny] strak the poor dumb tyke;
If I had fill’d a nook within her breast,
She wad have shawn mair kindness to my beast.
When I begin to tune my stock and horn,
With a’ her face she shaws a cauliife scorn.
Last night I play’d, ye never heard sic spite.
*O’re Bogie was the spring, and her delyte;*
Yet tauntingly she at her cousin speer’d,
Gif she cou’d tell what tune I play’d and sneer’d.

\(^*\) Its title was *Miss Bampfylde as Belinda*—an example of what has been called, in Part One, a role-playing portrait, in which a fashionable lady is dressed and posed as a fashionable literary character. There is a possibility that some pictures exhibited simply as “Belinda,” without any reference to Pope, may have been theatrical portraits; the name was a common one in Restoration and eighteenth-century comedy (e.g. Van Brugh’s *The Provok’d Wife*, Shadwell’s *The Fair Quaker of Deal*, and Arthur Murphy’s *All in the Wrong*). Belinda was also the eponymous heroine of a novel by Maria Edgeworth (1801).
and unsatisfactory,” asserted the Athenaeum, “—very coarse and careless in handling, very lurid in colour, and very feeble in expression. . . . Lord Petre, who dangles the heavy lock like a dead rat he is going to throw out of window, is scarcely at first observed. The humor is heavy; the mock-heroic of the poem quite lost, and an air of dull seriousness thrown over the whole.” Ruskin, however, had no reservations at all. “An absolute masterpiece” he called it, “and perhaps the most covetable picture of its kind which I ever remember seeing by an English artist.”

Pope’s other poems were seldom represented in art. Maria Cosway portrayed for Macklin’s Poet’s Gallery a subject from Windsor Forest, a Musidora-like nymph named Lodona evading the embraces of Pan by dissolving into “a soft silver stream.” At the same moment (1791), John Dean exhibited at the Royal Academy a didactic subject from the Epistle to Arbuthnot, Dutiful Children Attending Their Sick Mother, a companion piece to A Good Mother Instructing Her Children, from Thomson’s The Seasons. Half a century later (RA 1855), Augustus Egg derived from Epistle III of the Moral Essays a pair of subjects most agreeable to the Victorian conviction that the wages of dissipation and pride is squalid death. The Life and Death of Buckingham (pl. 293, 294) was Hogarth’s Rake’s Progress moved back to the Restoration:

Look on this picture, and on that [said Fraser’s Magazine]. . . . On the left, is the Duke in gay attire, at table, with half-a-dozen men drinking, and half-a-dozen women drunk. Behind him, standing as well as he can, is, if we mistake not, his sacred Majesty Charles II, most royally tipsy—an orgie such as we never witnessed but once, and that at the Vaudeville in La Dame aux Camélias. On the right hand, is “the worst inn’s worst room,” with all the accessory meannesses invented by the poet, and on the bed is the corpse of Buckingham, just dead, in his agony and despair, gaunt, convulsed, frightful to behold. The story of the death is entirely devoid of historical foundation, but the moral is everlastingly true, and pointed here with great skill and power. No one who has ever seen these two pictures can forget them.

*THOMSON*

For well over a century after its publication in 1726–30, James Thomson’s The Seasons was the most popular poem in the English language. Between 1750 and 1800, it went through at least 174 editions, and in the next half century, 270; in 1790–1810 alone, more than eighty appeared. It found its way into cottages where its only companions on the shelf were the Bible and The Pilgrim’s Progress; in elegantly illustrated format, it was on the library table of every middle-class family with any pretension to literary cultivation. When Coleridge came across a well-worn copy at a country alehouse, he exclaimed, “That is true fame!” It was fame amplified by the widespread practice of making schoolchildren memorize passages from the poem, chiefly in behalf of the unexceptionable piety that pervaded its four books. Not surprisingly under these circumstances, the catalogues of art exhibitions contained more quotations from The Seasons than from the works of any other English poet except Shakespeare and Milton.

With the sole exception of Paradise Lost, more paintings were derived from the poem than from any other single work of English literature. There are records of more than 150 of them, beginning as early as 1765–67, when Richard Wilson exhibited his A Summer Storm, with the Story of the Two Lovers (Celadon and Amelia) and Thomas Smith of Derby his companion landscapes showing the stories of two other pairs of lovers, Damon
and Musidora and Palemon and Lavinia. No year passed without new pictures from Thomson being exhibited, and their popularity continued unabated until past the middle of the nineteenth century, when, significantly, the number of new editions also began to dwindle.

There were two reasons for Thomson’s initial appeal to painters. One was that he was the first to seize upon landscape as a prime subject of English poetry, thus providing a literary context and rationale for the slowly developing native school of landscape artists. Joseph Warton wrote in his *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope* (1756) that Thomson “hath enriched poetry with a variety of new and original images, which he painted from nature itself, and from his own actual observations: his descriptions have, therefore, a distinctness and truth, which are utterly wanting to those of poets who have only copied from each other, and have never looked abroad on the objects themselves.” It was under Thomson’s auspices that the English landscape school began to burgeon with Richard Wilson and bloomed with Turner and Constable, both of whom *The Seasons* served as a poetic storehouse.

At the same time, eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century artists valued the poem as much for its verbal realization of the imagery of Old Master landscapists as for its intrinsic poetic quality. Although Thomson specifically mentioned Claude, Poussin, and Salvator Rosa in a passage of verbal landscape painting in *The Castle of Indolence*, recent scholars have found a larger source of influence in the “heroic” landscapes of Renaissance and baroque art—Guido Reni, Rubens, Guercino, Carracci, Spagnoletto. The landscapes in *The Seasons* invited English artists to paint nature in emulation of their great predecessors, and to fit their productions into the long tradition of art representing the progress of the seasons. Emblematic pictures of the months abounded in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century books of hours, a set of sixteenth-century tapestries in the Uffizi Gallery depict the theme, and it was a popular subject in seventeenth-century painting. Poussin painted four seasonal landscapes for the Duke of Richelieu in the 1660s. In England, the progress of the seasons had been embedded in the poetical tradition ever since Spenser’s *The Shepherd’s Calendar*, and in Thomson’s own time, the Duke of Beaufort owned a Roman sarcophagus whose designs illustrated the motif.

293–294. Augustus Egg, *The Life and Death of Buckingham* (RA 1855) (Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection). These two paintings were exhibited in a single frame, which had a border of vine leaves through which a death’s head protruded at each corner. They constituted a Hogarthian morality-in-paint and were based on Pope’s description, in the third of his *Moral Essays*, of the high-living Buckingham’s fall. The first picture shows him “Gallant and gay, in Cliveden’s proud alcove, / The bower of wanton Shrewsbury and love”; the second.

In the worst inn’s worst room, with hat half-hung,
The floors of plaster, and the walls of dung,
On once a flock-bed, but repair’d with straw,
With tape-tied curtains never meant to draw,
The George and Garter dangling from that bed
Where tawdry yellow strove with dirty red,

. . . how changed from him,
That life of pleasure, and that soul of whim!
By the end of the eighteenth century, she had already made her way to America. Washington Allston, a student at Harvard (class of 1800), painted a Musidora in his Cambridge room. Said his landlord, a carpenter by trade: "He has painted a woman, stark naked, going into the water to wash herself. It is as natural as life. Mr. Allston, sir, is quite a genius" (Jared B. Flagg, Life and Letters of Washington Allston [New York, 1892], pp. 23–24).

Appropriately enough, the duke exhibited his treasure against a décor designed by Thomson's first illustrator, William Kent. Thus the artistic association of many pictures nominally inspired by The Seasons was as strong as their literary heritage. As a poet, Thomson mediated between the old classical landscapists, including those who actually treated the seasons theme, and the new English ones.

The leading authority on Thomson, Ralph Cohen, has said that "The Seasons was for more than one hundred and fifty years the most illustrated poem in the English language." The decade of the 1790s alone saw the publication of no fewer than a dozen new illustrated editions. Of the several well-known illustrators of The Seasons at this time, William Hamilton was the most prolific; he made designs for five editions between 1777 and 1801, the year he died. At the Academy that year and the next, he was represented by two designs for DuRoveray's deluxe edition, and Fuseli by two others (Celadon and Amelia and The Dying Shepherd).

As the subjects of these pictures indicate, The Seasons was valued not only for the opportunities it provided to paint landscapes per se but also as a source of pathetic and sentimental anecdotes—thus providing the desirable element of figures in either the foreground or the background of the landscape—and figure studies. To gallerygoers, The Seasons was best known as the poem from which Musidora came. The passage in "Summer" in which this stellar water nymph of British art appears had long been admired; Wordsworth said in 1815 that any well-thumbed copy of The Seasons automatically opened at the story of Musidora at the stream and Damon spying on her:

... But, desperate youth,
How durst thou risk the soul-distracting view;
As from her naked limbs, of glowing white,
Harmonious swell'd by Nature's finest hand,
In folds loose-floating fell the fainter lawn,
And fairly expos'd she stood, shrunk from herself,
With fancy blushing, at the doubtful breeze
Alarm'd, and starting like the fearful fawn?

(Lines 1313–20)

(There is more.) Musidora appeared rather belatedly in illustrated editions of The Seasons. The first portrayal of her testing the water before her modest bath appeared in the first edition illustrated by Hamilton (1777). Although she turned up in edition after edition, she remained a controversial figure well into the new century. The editor of Sharpe's edition (1816), whose designs by Westall included one of Musidora, was curiously defensive, though less about the figure as the artists portrayed her than about her story. "We know we shall offend common prejudice," he wrote, "in pronouncing the Tale of Musidora, which has furnished so many artists with a subject, and the publishers of so many editions of Thomson with a captivating embellishment, to be as vulgarly conceived, and to be as coarse in sentiment, though not in expression, as a Dutch painting. But Thomson is chastity and purity itself in comparison with his contemporaries."* 

No such scruples prevailed in the art world, however. "What a pure, virginal, shrinking, chaste, delightful creature is Musidora," marveled Benjamin Robert Haydon to his diary in 1828. Irrespective of the lady's modesty, female nudity was taken for granted in imitations of Titian or
Rubens and in portrayals of the two classic exemplifications of the motif, the biblical Susannah and the voyeuristic elders, and Diana and Actaeon—the young woman by the water observed by a lubricious male, or, in more general terms, the nymph under the scrutiny of a satyr. If nudity was sanctioned in painters’ versions of biblical or mythological stories, it was no less permissible in an episode from a universally admired and impeccably moral English poem. The pose, the presence or absence of a voyeur, and the degree of nudity were unimportant. To ensure a freshly painted female nude’s respectability, it was only necessary to provide her with a rustic English setting and call her Musidora. Thus the practice developed of labeling almost any otherwise unidentified nude-in-the-stream as Musidora. The most celebrated case of retroactive christening is an early one, Gainsborough’s large oval that is now in the Tate Gallery. At his death, it was sold as A Nymph at the Bath but subsequently—merely because it conformed to a popular type—it was renamed Musidora.

Among the late eighteenth-century artists who named their unclothed creations Musidora were Opie (Macklin’s Poet’s Gallery), Smirke (RA 1792), and Hamilton (1794).* In the next generation, William Etty sent a Musidora to the Royal Academy in 1843 (pl. 62); it was so successful that he subsequently painted three more versions. Musidora was also the subject of Arthur Hughes’s first exhibited picture (pl. 295), and at various times in these years William Frost took time off from his production of paintings from Milton’s Comus to turn out a number of Musidoras. By then, the subject had become so trite that the Literary Gazette could say of Frost’s 1850 version, with appropriately weary wit, “This lady is naturally a favourite subject for a dip of the brush, as she is going to have a dip herself . . . commonplace, not poetry nor art.”† By that time, she was three-quarters of the way to establishing her record of some sixty exhibited pictures.

After “Summer,” with its story of Damon and Musidora, the book of The Seasons most often represented in painting was “Autumn” with its biblically inspired (Boaz and Ruth) story of Palemon and Lavinia, the gleaner and mother who touchingly relates her misfortunes to her attentive children. About fifty pictures from “Autumn” are recorded, but the connection many of them had with The Seasons was as tenuous as that of pictures of Musidora. As often as not, the name Lavinia and the reference to Thomson’s poem were merely hung onto routine figure studies of gleaners, either returning from the fields with their day’s harvest or resting and quietly ruminating. Reynolds’s The Gleaners (also known as The Cottagers) for Macklin was actually a fake-rustic conversation piece, the gleaner having been modeled by a Miss Potts, the future mother of Edwin Landseer. Gainsborough’s Lavinia derived hardly more than the name from Thomson. It had been painted some years before the Macklin commission, and its alternative name, Cottage Girl with a Bowl of Milk, is a more accurate description.

The story of Amelia, who is killed by lightning, and her lover Celadon was from “Summer.” It attracted fewer artists, but it was the first Seasons subject to be painted; and some twenty treatments are recorded down to 1850, after which the theme faded from view. Some ten paintings, none of any interest, were derived from Thomson’s other major poem, The Castle of Indolence.

From 1736 to his death in 1748, Thomson lived in a pair of cottages in

*At the height of his prosperity as an Edinburgh portraitist, Raeburn received a commission from Lord de Tabley to paint a subject of his own choice. “His anxiety to produce a work worthy of a place in that collection,” wrote a contemporary, “made him long fastidious. He at last selected Musidora, from Thomson’s Seasons, but unfortunately he was called away before he could accomplish the object of his honourable ambition” (Whitley [3], p. 49). In view of the frequency with which Musidora had already been painted, “fastidious” does not seem quite the right word.
Kew Foot Lane, Richmond, and his admirers liked to fancy him standing on nearby Richmond Hill, awaiting inspiration. ("Heavens! what a goodly prospect spreads around" was the motto attached to a picture of The Bard of The Seasons on Richmond Hill, exhibited in 1863.) This was the site represented in Turner's most direct tribute to the poet, Thomson's Aeolian Harp (pl. 296), exhibited at his private gallery in 1809, which depicts a celebratory ritual around a monument to the poet on Richmond Hill, with the Thames in the background. The picture aptly symbolizes the considerable debt that English artists owed to the pictorial poet of The Seasons.

GRAY

In addition to being a poet, Thomas Gray was a fairly representative eighteenth-century man of taste; and as such, he had a greater than ordinary interest in the fine arts. Like Thomson before him, he derived suggestions for his poetic imagery from the painters most revered in his age. In a footnote to his description of the Bard, in his Pindaric ode so named—"Loose his beard, and hoary hair / Stream'd, like a meteor to the troubled air"—he specifically acknowledged the inspiration of the image of God in a painting of Ezekiel’s vision that Gray took to be from Raphael’s brush, although Raphael is now thought to have been responsible only for the general design. His friend William Mason, however, wrote that Gray "used to say" that Parmigiano’s Moses Breaking the Tables of the Law “came still nearer to his meaning than the picture of Raphael.” The image of the streaming meteor, in any case, is a striking example of the merging within small compass of a pictorial and a literary source, for it also recalls Milton’s line describing Azazel’s banner in Paradise Lost (1.537): “Shone like a meteor streaming to the wind.”
Gray shared his age's reverence for the Italian masters as well as the great trio of seventeenth-century landscapists, Poussin, Claude, and Salvator Rosa. Jean Hagstrum has argued that the three living figures in the last section of the "Elegy in a Country Churchyard" were suggested by a painting of Poussin, *The Shepherds of Arcady*, which was well known to Gray's contemporaries through engravings and was alluded to in paintings by Reynolds, Richard Wilson, and Joseph Wright of Derby. But apart from a reference in one of his letters to Paul Sandby's early picture *The Bard*, Gray virtually never evinced any interest in English painting. English artists were more partial to him than he to them. Quotations from his poems, especially the "Elegy in a Country Churchyard" and "The Bard," accompanied scores of paintings into the exhibition rooms.

Down to the middle of the nineteenth century, a point at which the supply abruptly ended—only three examples are recorded after 1848—some twenty "Elegy" subject pictures were seen. From the poem's widely memorized chain of stanzas evoking the sentiment of humble rural life and death were drawn such genre and emblematic subjects as (to cite three instances from the "Elegy's" early career in art) *Rustick Happiness* (RA 1778), *Noon* (Society of Artists 1783), and *A Cottager and Family* (RA 1787). As late as 1837, artists continued to paint sets of "Morning," "Noon," and "Evening," each picture illustrating a specific scene in the poem. One of W. P. Frith's early canvases (RA 1846)—it was, at the same time, one of the last "Elegy" pictures—represented *The Return from Labour*, a cozy rural domestic scene from the poem's opening stanzas, and a slightly earlier painting by John Martin (BI 1842) was *Curfew Time*. A recurrent subject was Stoke Poges church, traditionally the site of the poet's elegiac meditation. A treatment of the scene exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1775 was bought by Gray's friend Horace Walpole for his picture gallery at Strawberry Hill.*

Paintings from "The Bard" were landmarks in the transition of English art from neoclassicism to Romanticism. Between 1761 and 1820, it was the subject of at least a dozen oil paintings and numerous drawings, including a number of watercolors by Blake. The poem derived from the Welsh legend that upon his conquest of the country Edward I ordered the extinction of all bards, the repositories and mouthpieces of Welsh nationalism. The sole surviving bard, standing on the rocky slope of Mount Snowdon, pronounces a curse on the king, whose English armies are marching below. He prophesies the glories to come to Britain under the Tudors and their poets, and then hurls himself into the torrent at the base of the cliff. (The same final action was the subject of several paintings from Byron's *Manfred*.) The Bard poem, in itself and in its subsequent illustrations, aptly illustrates the interweaving of the age's arts and its culture. In painting as in poetry, it was an expression of the warming patriotism that accompanied George III's accession to the throne in 1760; and it added power to the notion, ultimately to become one of the basic articles of the Romantic creed, of the poet's high calling as prophet.

To judge from the surviving examples and descriptions of some of the lost ones (twenty are recorded altogether), paintings from "The Bard" were regularly exercises in the heroic-sublime, differing chiefly in the respective emphases they laid upon the solitary figure and the enveloping wild landscape. The earliest example was Paul Sandby's *Historical Land-
Benjamin West, *The Bard* (RA 1809) (Tate Gallery, London). "A venerable Bard standing on the brow of a stupendous rock, agonized at the murders of his inspired brethren, and falling country, and imprecating prophetic vengeance on a sanguinary foe, is a subject partaking of the sublime, because emotions of terror, of resentment, and sorrow, are its objects. . . . The mixed feelings of grief, and an anger which pours curses on an advancing enemy, are powerfully portrayed in the Bard's face, turned head, and extended arm. . . . Terror, destruction, and death, hover with the Eagles who are waiting for their prey" (Robert Hunt in the *Examiner*, 21 May).

Twenty years later, Martin's nephew Richard exhibited *The Bard's Lament* (RA 1837). Richard was the son of John's brother Jonathan, who had set fire to York Minster. He was himself not untouched by the strain of madness in the family, and the year after the picture was exhibited, he cut his throat, firm in the belief that his breath was turning his relatives black.

The catholicity of appeal "The Bard" had to pre-Victorian artists is suggested by the fact that both Martin and Etty, who had little else in common except ambition, painted it. The resemblance of Martin's (pl. 298) to Corbould's (unexhibited) canvas of ten years earlier is so marked as almost to certify that somehow Martin had seen it. As usual in his treatments of literary subjects, the "central" figure is so minuscule as to be almost invisible against the massive background.* Etty forsook the usual sublime scene in favor of an allegory (pl. 299). The *Morning Chronicle* called the picture “another indulgence of what we once hoped a classical, but which we are now convinced is a lascivious, mind. If Mr. Etty continues to revel in this meretricious vein,” it continued, “the labour of his anatomical studies in the school will avail him nothing—no decent family can hang such sights against their walls. The naked female may, in the severity of the antique, be modest, but it is not so in the attitudes of Mr. Etty.” This is probably the only case on record in which a painting from Gray was denounced as indecent.

Beginning with what is usually considered the first modern English novel, the illustration of fiction got off to an ambitious start. The sixth edition of Richardson's *Pamela* (1742) contained twenty-nine plates, twelve designed by Francis Hayman and the rest by Hubert Gravelot, who etched them all. The following year, Joseph Highmore announced in the newspapers his intention of painting a series of twelve pictures from the novel and invited subscriptions to the engravings to be made from them:

1. Mr. B. finds Pamela writing
2. Pamela and Mr. B. in the summer house
3. Pamela fainting
4. Pamela preparing to go home
5. Pamela leaves Mr. B.'s house
6. Pamela shows Mr. Williams a hiding place for their letters
7. Pamela in the bedroom with Mrs. Jewkes and Mr. B.
8. Pamela greets her father
9. Pamela is married
10. Pamela and Lady Davers
11. Pamela asks Sir Jacob Swynford's blessing (pl. 4)
12. Pamela tells a nursery tale
The engravings seem to have sold well at first, but copies of the second issue (1762) were still listed in Boydell's catalogue as late as 1803. The original oils disappeared, to resurface only in 1920, when they were offered for sale at Christie's as being from the studio of a Dutch artist and representing scenes from *Clarissa Harlowe*. Comparison with the engravings immediately established their true identity. Two other paintings from *Pamela*, said to have been in the style of Hayman, graced the supper boxes at Vauxhall: Mr. B. overhearing Pamela confessing to the housekeeper that she wishes to return home, and Pamela fleeing to the coach while Lady Davers's footmen try to stop her.

The reception of these illustrations evidently was warm enough to encourage Highmore, who by then had become a friend of the novelist and the painter of his portrait (now in the National Portrait Gallery), to

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298. John Martin, *The Bard* (RA 1817) (Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne). As he did with Macbeth (pl. 231) and Manfred (pl. 331), Martin subordinated the human figure to the terrifying mountains, rushing cascades, and tumultuous skies that obsessed him.


Fair laughs the morn and soft the zephyr blows,
While, proudly riding o'er the azure realm,
In gallant trim the gilded vessel goes,
Youth on the prow, and Pleasure at the helm,
Regardless of the sweeping Whirlwind's sway,
That, hushed in grim repose, expects his evening prey.

Etty explained, rather cloudily, that Gray's lines were "a general allegory of Human life, morally, where what we see here portrayed in its fabulous sense, is often real" (Farr, *William Etty*, p. 158).
prepare his brushes for Richardson's next novel, *Clarissa Harlowe.* It is thought that he planned a series similar to the *Pamela* one, but only two paintings emerged. One was a portrait of Clarissa, which Richardson praised in a letter to Lady Bradshaigh: "... He has drawn Clarissa at whole length, in the Vandyke taste and dress. He had finished the piece before I saw it, or knew of it, and before Clarissa was printed, having seen only some parts of the work in manuscript. His own imagination was his principal guide; and he has given it great intelligence, sweetness and dignity." This picture is now lost, but its companion, *The Harlowe Family*, is at Yale (pl. 5). Like the *Pamela* set, it later was grotesquely misattributed and misinterpreted. At the International Exhibition in London in 1862, it was shown as a Hogarth; and half a century later, Austin Dobson took it to be a theatrical picture set in the Drury Lane green room, with Mr. and Mrs. Pritchard, Barry, Fielding, Quin, and Lavinia Fenton, a true galaxy of contemporary stage stars. "Here we can see Hogarth at his best!” exclaimed Sir Charles Holmes, Slade Professor of Art.

In 1761, at the first exhibition of the Free Society of Artists, Highmore showed *A Whole Length of a Lady, in the Character of Clementina* in Richardson's last novel, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison.* Apart from this, a picture by Sir William Beechey of Clarissa Harlowe and Mr. Solmes (Society of Artists 1783) and an undated painting by Hayman, *Robert Lovelace Preparing to Abduct Clarissa Harlowe* (pl. 300), there seems to have been little further allusion to Richardson until 1796, when Northcote showed at the Royal Academy a series of ten pictures called *Diligence and Dissipation, the Progress of an Industrious and an Idle Girl.* Their dual inspiration—the industrious girl from Richardson, the idle one from Hogarth—was obvious:
1. The modest girl and the wanton, fellow-servants in a gentleman’s house
2. The wanton revelling with her companions
3. Good advice given by an old servant
4. The wanton in her bed-chamber
5. The modest girl in her bed-chamber
6. The wanton turned out of doors for misconduct
7. The modest girl rejects the illicit addresses of her master
8. The wanton, dying in poverty and disease, visited by the modest girl
9. The modest girl receives the honorable addresses of her master
10. The modest girl, married to her master, is led to her coach; while the wanton, dead in misery, is laid in her grave

After this, there was a hiatus of almost three decades in the representation of scenes taken directly or indirectly from Richardson, a dry spell which coincided with that in Fielding illustration. As with Fielding, one reason was the superior appeal of the newly arrived Sir Walter Scott. But, beginning in the 1830s with Charles Landseer’s Clarissa Harlowe in the Sponging-House (pl. 301), there was a mild revival of interest in pictures from Pamela and Clarissa Harlowe, a dozen being recorded in the next fifty years, slightly fewer than were painted of Tom Jones alone.

It appears that what Victorian artists valued in Richardson were not dramatic situations but opportunities for costumed sentiment utilizing, once more, the venerable theme of women reading letters or books. A typical production was George D. Leslie’s Clarissa (RA 1866): “a damsel in the costume of Richardson’s heroine (that quaint, inconvenient, unpicturesque dress of the least beautiful period of Art in this country), standing in the outer walks of an old English pleasance, deep in the perusal of a love-letter, and evidently not likely to proceed with her walk, though the evening sets into twilight, and a pet spaniel sniffs and whimpers in front, and so shows how long his patience has been under trial.”

Frith’s Pamela (RA 1874) showed the heroine “in full face before us, in a black dress and a white mop cap, writing, or in an interval of writing, and, with one hand on her cheek, with eyes of meditation, looking out at nothing”—in other words, one more pensive female with literary credentials.

Three paintings exhibited in 1868–71 were titled respectively The Novel of the Day, 1753: Sir Charles Grandison; Reading Sir Charles Grandison (this by Valentine Prinsep); and A Chapter from Pamela (by George H. Boughton). By that time, Richardson as a novelist possessed not a tithe of the lively interest he had had for Highmore’s contemporaries.

FIELDING

Down to the advent of Scott in the second decade of the nineteenth century, Fielding and Richardson were commonly regarded as the two greatest novelists England had produced. But whereas Richardson’s novels had attracted painters as soon as they were published, artists’ recognition of Tom Jones (published 1749) was delayed until 1777, when Tom Jones Rescuing Molly Seagrim was exhibited at the Society of Artists. The three editions of a volume of extracts, The Beauties of Fielding (1782), must have
helped sustain interest in Fielding through the rest of the century. At the exhibitions, there were pictures of Tom Jones rescuing Sophia Western and confronting the schoolmaster Square almost in flagrante delicto with Molly, as well as other subjects, some ten pictures in all. Stothard and Smirke contributed illustrations to various editions of the novel.

The peak of critical appreciation of Fielding before the twentieth century was reached in the years 1814–32, when almost the entire company of contemporary critics, including Coleridge, Hazlitt, Lamb, Scott, Southey, and Leigh Hunt, wrote about him at greater or shorter length. While Richardson's stock declined as his moralism and his epistolary form became antiquated (and his tedium became more oppressive?), Fielding's, despite misgivings as to the propriety of some of his comic and sexual scenes, rose. And yet—a prime instance of the way the critical prestige of an author at a given time did not necessarily match his popularity among painters—it was in these same years that Fielding virtually disappeared from the galleries. Between Arthur William Devis's Two Subjects from Tom Jones (RA 1808) and John Massey Wright's portrayal of the moment when Jenny Jones is submitting to the taunts and jeers of Mrs. Deborah Wilson and her attendant gossips (BI 1836), no painting from Tom Jones seems to have been exhibited.

Then the two curves reversed themselves. As the Victorian era began, Fielding's critical stock plunged, partly because his fiction was overshadowed by the established presence of Scott, partly because his humor was too strong for the new reading audience's affectation of gentility. The coming of Dickens and Thackeray further depressed Fielding's stock, which in fact reached its lowest market value at the time of Thackeray's lectures on the English humorists (1851) in which he delivered an extensive ad hominem diatribe, deploring the man as well as his fiction. Yet, though people may not have read him, they were offered some fifteen paintings, admittedly always of situations that could not possibly have raised a blush to Georgiana Podnap's susceptible cheek, for they were always sentimental love or domestic scenes. Both Leslie (RA 1850) and Frith (RA 1875) depicted Tom Jones showing Sophia her image in the glass "as a pledge of her future constancy." Sophia was seen several times at the spinet, playing the square to sleep; in other pictures, she and Tom were saying goodbye; in still others, she was merely one more beautiful woman from stock. Frith depicted her (RA 1875) in a dark blue braided riding habit, warming her hands at an inn fire, and in an earlier portrait by A. E. Chalon (RA 1857), she was seen "reclining in an arm-chair, in deep meditation, and near her lies a muff, from which a Cupid is creeping with the evident intention of wounding her with an arrow, which he grasps in his hand"—as if the artist had inadvertently picked up The Rape of the Lock instead of Fielding's novel.

SMOLLETT

Largely because of his earthy humor and the superior attraction of Sterne's sentimentality, Smollett's fiction seems to have had only a limited readership in the nineteenth century, and two novels, Roderick Random and Peregrine Pickle, were the sources of only about ten paintings between them, all but one produced before 1850. (There appear to have been none at all from Smollett's most famous novel, Humphry Clinker.) The only painting of which much notice was taken was Leslie's Reading the Will (RA 1846), derived from a scene in Roderick Random. It was well received by the
critics, including Thackeray, who drew flattering comparisons with Hogarth. This was Leslie's version of a narrative genre subject already familiar in art, though based instead on a similar episode in Scott's *Guy Mannering* or, sometimes, on no literary source at all. Wilkie's *The Reading of a Will* (RA 1820), with a reference to Scott, had been preceded by at least two other treatments, William Lizar's *Reading the Will* (Edinburgh 1811), which was engraved by Turner, and Edward Bird's *The Reading of the Will Concluded* (RA 1811).

**STERNE**

Ironically, since *ut pictura poesis* had nothing to do with fiction, it was two novelists, Sterne and Fielding, who, after Pope, best exemplified in their different ways the affinity of literature and painting in the eighteenth century. Sterne was himself an artist of no particular ability. His early memoirist, John Croft, wrote that "he chiefly copied Portraits. He had a good idea of Drawing, but not the least of mixing his colours." As his many allusions to the critical and technical vocabulary of painting and to master artists and their works testify, Sterne wrote *Tristram Shandy* fully conscious of the bearing the artist's techniques and choices had upon those of the novelist. He found food for aesthetic thought in Hogarth's *Analysis of Beauty*, which he burlesqued in his description of Corporal Trim's posture as he was about to preach the sermon (volume 2, chapter 17). Having had Hogarth in mind when he wrote the passage, Sterne naturally wished him to illustrate it, and in a characteristic letter wrote to a friend (8 March 1760?):

> By the Father of the Sciences (you know his Name), I would give both my Ears (If I was not to lose my Credit by it), for no more than ten strokes of Hogarth's witty Chissel, to clap at the Front of my next Edition of Shandy. . . . What Shall we do? I have the worst face in the world to ask a favour with—and besides I would not propose a disagreeable thing to one I so much admire for the whole world—but you can say any Thing—You are an impudent honest Dog & can't set a face upon a bad Matter—prithee sally out to Leicester fields, and when You have knockd at the door (for you must knock first) and art got in—begin thus "—Mr. Hogarth, I have been with my friend Shandy this morning"—but go on yr own Way—as I shall do mine.

The application was successful. Hogarth not only provided the scene desired, which formed the frontispiece of the first volume in the new edition, but threw in, as the frontispiece to the third volume, the christening of young Shandy.

While still at York, before his sudden celebrity drew him to the accolades and fleshpots of London, Sterne had a nodding acquaintance with George Romney, then an apprentice of the portraitist Christopher Steele. Scarceley had the first two volumes of *Tristram Shandy* come from the press in that town (1759) than Romney painted four illustrations, his earliest independent work: *The Death of LeFevre, Dr. Slop with Obadiah, Dr. Slop in Mr. Shandy's Parlor, and Uncle Toby and Obadiah in the Garden*. None of these has survived, but Romney's early friend Adam Walker, a self-taught writer and lecturer on science (see above, under Milton), left a description of his treatment of the death of LeFevre, whose story, in Hazlitt's opinion, was "perhaps the finest in the English language":

> The figures were about eighteen inches high, and wonderfully expressive. The dying lieutenant was looking at Uncle Toby, who sat mute at the foot of the bed; and by the motion of his hand was recommending his son to his care. The boy
was kneeling by the bedside, and with eyes that expressed his anguish of heart,
as it were, turning from a dying to a living father, begging protection; a
most pathetic figure. Trim was standing at a distance, in his usual attitude, with
a face full of grief.7

Despite, or perhaps because of, the *Tristram Shandy* mania of the ensuing
years, when imitations, parodies, caricatures, printed handkerchiefs,
and every other manifestation of popular enthusiasm then current made
the book as feverishly famous as *Pickwick Papers* was to be seventy years
later, almost no other paintings followed Romney's at the time. No doubt
the book's eccentricity as well as its having touched off a ludicrous fad
stigmatized it in the eyes of serious artists. Even its pathos failed to recom­
mand it; Henry Singleton's *Death of LeFevre* (1796) was virtually the only
*Shandy* painting exhibited at the Royal Academy for many decades after
the novel appeared.8

The early career of *A Sentimental Journey* in art was very different. Its
appearance in 1768 touched off a vogue only a little less frenetic than the
one inspired by *Tristram Shandy*. Although it had its awkward spots, on the
whole it achieved a more decorous reputation than that of its frequently
bawdy predecessor, thanks to its high assay of pathos and sentiment at a
time when popular taste was tending more and more in that direction.
The book benefited especially from the wide circulation of various an­
thologies called *The Beauties of Sterne*, the first of which went through
twelve editions between 1782 and 1793. These consisted of passages from
Sterne's works, including his sermons, "Selected for the Heart of Sensi­
bility" and therefore providing "all his Pathetic Tales, and most dis­
tinguished Observations on Life." Three especially pathetic tales were
featured, those of LeFevre, the Monk (in *Tristram Shandy*; not often pic­
tured), and Maria (briefly in *Tristram Shandy*, at length in *A Sentimental
Journey*). ("I intended to have arranged them alphabetically," wrote the
editor of the third edition of the original *Beauties*, "till I found the sto­
ries . . . would be too closely connected for the feeling reader, and would
wound the bosom of sensibility too deeply; I therefore placed them at a
proper distance from each other.")9

 Whereas there were few *Tristram Shandy* paintings between Romney's
initial and wholly obscure early treatments and (as we shall see) the mod­
est revival in the 1830s, pictures from *A Sentimental Journey* were seen in
the galleries from the 1770s onward, without any significant interruption.
Some seventy are recorded, their history falling into two phases, the first
dominated by sentimental themes, the second by humorous anecdotes.
Of the sentimental subjects, the most often painted, by a large margin,
was the sorrowful Maria, driven from pensiveness to madness by a per­
fidious lover: the very prototype, along with Ophelia, of the fragile and
pitiable young woman so often portrayed in English popular art (pl. 94).
Contemporary and early nineteenth-century criticism abounded with
florid tributes to her appeal to the reader's sensibility. Edward Mangin,
the author of *A View of the Pleasures Arising from a Love of Books* (1814), said:

> [Sterne's] portrait of the forlorn and gentle Maria is complete in all the lines and
tints which constitute grace and softness: her form, that of loveliness not im­
paired but rendered more engaging by feebleness and sorrow, than the beauty
of health and happiness can ever be; her ornament, a riband of pale green; her
attitude, sitting with her elbow in her lap, and her head leaning on one side
within her hand: her hair streaming loose, and tears trickling down her
cheek.10
This reads almost as if the author had a particular painting in mind. By this time, there were already plenty to choose from, and many more were to come; the total of recorded Maria pictures would eventually reach thirty. The most celebrated of those that survive are two by Joseph Wright of Derby, painted in 1777, the same year in which Angelica Kauffmann exhibited a treatment at the Royal Academy, and in 1781 (they are quite different compositions). The subject seems to have been particularly adaptable to bibelots. Wright’s treatment, it has been said, “is similar to that of the figures on the jasperware products of his friend Wedgwood”; and Kauffmann’s was actually transferred to articles of all sorts and sizes, from watchcases to tea-waiters. Northcote painted Sterne and Maria (1784), and as late as 1868, Frith depicted Maria and her goat.

Two other pathetic subjects from A Sentimental Journey recurred from time to time before the public appetite for this sort of art was finally sated. One was the story of the captive, painted early on by three leading eighteenth-century artists, Benjamin West (ca. 1772–80), Wright (RA 1778), and John Hamilton Mortimer (pen and ink sketch, 1774). The other was the story of the pilgrim on his way to a Spanish shrine whose ass dies by the wayside. West painted it about the time he painted the captive, George Carter portrayed it at the Society of Artists in 1773 (pl. 8), and Wright left a canvas of The Old Man and His Ass unfinished at his death in 1797. One of the last treatments was Richard Ansdell’s (BI 1850).

By this time, taste had decisively shifted from Sterne’s sentimental episodes to his humorous ones. In the period 1830–60, when the fashion of anecdotal genre was at its height, there were more comic scenes from A Sentimental Journey than there were portrayals of Maria. All of the favorite subjects involved Yorick and one of the three flirtatious women with whom he had monetary and other transactions: the grisette (Gilbert Stuart Newton [pl. 91] and Frith [pl. 302]), the innkeeper’s daughter (Frith, RA 1868), and the femme de chambre. Meanwhile, the fortunes of Tristram Shandy in art became more closely dependent on the author’s personal reputation, which was inseparable from what came to be regarded as the more dubious aspects of the novel. As a novelist whose genius fulfilled itself in idiosyncrasy, he was praised by such critics as Hazlitt, Coleridge, and Scott, and a little later by DeQuincey and Carlyle. But his personal character came under attack in the first half of the century with revelations of the full extent of his plagiarisms and of conduct that sometimes was unbecoming a parson. This moral reaction against him both as man and as artist reached its climax in Thackeray’s indictment in one of his lectures on the English humorists: “He goes to work systematically and of cold blood; paints his face, puts on his ruff and motley clothes, and lays down his carpet and tumbles on it. . . . There is not a page in Sterne’s writing but has something that were better away, a latent corruption—a hint, as of an impure presence.” One suspects that Thackeray purposely heightened the colors of his moral portraiture for the sake of a more arresting contrast with the affectionate account of Oliver Goldsmith that immediately followed. Sterne nonetheless retained many admirers.

Whatever their differences, Victorian moralists and critics agreed in deploiring the Rabelaisian and satirical strains in Tristram Shandy, and consequently the twenty or so paintings that are recorded from between 1830 and 1885 concentrated exclusively on its pathetic and amiably hu-
morous episodes. The most famous was Leslie’s *Uncle Toby and the Widow Wadman in the Sentry Box* (pl. 45), of which at least three versions were painted. The remarks of Tom Taylor, Leslie’s biographer, suggest the selective spirit with which Leslie painted, and contemporaries received, the scene:

Any painter with a stain of impurity in his imagination would have risked offence in touching such a subject. There is more prurience in Sterne’s pen than in Leslie’s pencil. In his hands the widow becomes so loveable a person, that we overlook the fierceness of the amorous siege she is laying to Uncle Toby’s heart; while Uncle Toby himself is so thoroughly the gentleman,—so unmistakably innocent and unsuspecting, and single-hearted,—that the humour of the situation seems filtered of all its grossness.\(^\text{13}\)

Two years later, Leslie followed up his success with *Tristram Shandy Recovering the Lost Manuscript* (RA 1833). Constable, it is said, arranged the chiaroscuro, and, because Leslie thought he resembled Sterne “very
strongly,” the American artist Samuel F. B. Morse sat for the Tristram figure.14

Subsequent artists took other subjects from Tristram Shandy. In 1849, Alfred Elmore showed at the Royal Academy “Mr. Shandy leaning on his cane, reading to the tailor at work on a pair of breeches ‘a lecture upon the lotus clavis, and pointing to the precise part of the waistband where he was determined to have it sewed on.’”15 In 1866, Frith ventured to revive the scene Leslie had represented with such success almost forty years earlier, Uncle Toby and the Widow Wadman in the sentry box (pl. 67), but it was received with much less enthusiasm. At least two critics, on the Times and the Examiner, complained that the widow was far too young and “bewitching” to be true to Sterne’s “rather coarse” character and that the back of the stalwart male figure was equally unfaithful to Uncle Toby.16

The remaining Tristram Shandy paintings drew from the same vein of humor, sometimes tinged with pathos. In 1879–80, for example, two artists, Sir John Gilbert and John Dawson Watson, portrayed Uncle Toby and Corporal Trim, the latter picture showing the loyal soldier laying Toby’s sword and scabbard across his coffin “ere he returns to the door to take his horse by the bridle to follow his beloved master’s hearse as he has directed him”—an event not reached in the novel. But by this time, Sterne’s appeal to the art-loving public had largely evaporated. Indeed, a full decade earlier (1869), when Francis Turner Palgrave reproduced Newton’s Yorick and the Grisette in color, from a woodblock, in his Gems of English Art of This Century, he remarked, “One may doubt whether, at the present day, Sterne be not falling into the position of those authors of whose books one might say that they are supposed to be known to everybody, and practically are read by nobody.”18

GOLDSMITH

As a token of his welcome presence in the Reynolds-Johnson coterie of artists and writers, Oliver Goldsmith held the honorary Professorship of Ancient History in the Royal Academy—a chair suggested by Dr. Johnson himself, “in order that Goldy might have a right to be at their dinners.”1 In view of the employment he was to give to artists during the next century, the honor was well earned. With the possible exception of Thomson, among art lovers Goldsmith was the most popular eighteenth-century author. The numerous early paintings suggested by the pathetic ballad of “The Hermit” (“Edwin and Angelina”) were the precursors of well over one hundred canvases derived from The Vicar of Wakefield, in which it was first published. “We read the Vicar of Wakefield in youth and in age,” wrote Sir Walter Scott. “We return to it again and again, and bless the memory of an author who contrives so well to reconcile us to human nature.”2 Although some good judges of literature were less enthusiastic, common readers shared Scott’s opinion, and it was their taste that prevailed most dramatically in the 1840s when, in a single decade, almost as many pictures from The Vicar of Wakefield were exhibited (some thirty) as had been seen in the entire preceding sixty years.

Before this boom, the Vicar tradition in art was fed by such works as Charles Ryley’s The Sermon in Prison and The Return of Olivia (both RA 1787) and John Martin’s version of “The Hermit” (BI 1817), which was not at all characteristic of the artist whose Joshua had won a prize at the exhibition the year before and whose The Fall of Babylon two years later
would cause a sensation. In 1828, Gilbert Stuart Newton hung at the Royal Academy his The Vicar of Wakefield Reconciling His Wife to Olivia, which was bought by the Marquis of Lansdowne for his gallery at Bowood. Wilkie, according to Haydon, was unkind enough to say that Newton’s Vicar “looked like Goldsmith in a dress of Molière’s. It had not got the simplicity of Goldsmith.”

The Vicar of Wakefield was the perfect book to ride the surge of enthusiasm for homely narrative and genre paintings that marked the period. It had everything to meet the popular taste of the moment: domestic warmth (“There is no novel in our own, or any language, that possesses more interest or pathos in all its domestic relations,” said an art critic in 1839), a plot studded with interesting but not agitating incidents, individualized characters such as the amiably eccentric Dr. Primrose himself, and heroines (Olivia and Sophia) admirably suited to be the subjects of sentimental figure studies. From no other novel and indeed from few if any other literary works of comparable length did artists derive so many separate episodes. The majority were strung on the main plot line: Olivia’s elopement with Thornhill and her subsequent rescue and return by her father; the Vicar’s imprisonment for debt; the ambiguous Mr. Burchell’s courtship of Sophia. But no one scene or small group of scenes predominated, as they did, for example, in the paintings from most of Shakespeare’s plays.

In 1838, Daniel Maclise was among the first to portray the comic epi-
sode of Moses going to the fair to sell the colt Blackberry and returning with the gross of green spectacles he has been paid. Then came Richard Redgrave's *The Return of Olivia to Her Parents* (RA 1839) and Maclise's *Hunt the Slipper at Neighbour Flamorough's* (RA 1841), depicting the moment just before "the 'ill-managed mirth' of the Primroses received a sudden interruption and rebuke from the stately apparition of Lady Blarney and Miss Caroline Wilhelmina Skeggs."5

The following year (1842), Charles Cope showed three Goldsmith subjects at the Royal Academy. But these were overshadowed by W. P. Frith's first successful painting, one that would shortly lead him to become something of a specialist in the Goldsmith repertory: *Measuring Heights* (pl. 303).

Contributing to the *Vicar* vogue at this moment was the appearance of an edition containing thirty-two wood engravings after designs by William Mulready, the climax of a series of editions illustrated by Stothard (1792), Thomas Uwins (1812), Rowlandson (1817), and George Cruikshank (1830, 1832). In both 1843 and 1844, the London exhibitions contained no fewer than six *Vicar* paintings, including one by Leslie, Frith's older fellow painter of literary subjects—his only picture from Goldsmith, "whom," remarked Tom Taylor, "one would have supposed likely to be one of his favourite authors."7 Reviewing the Academy exhibition of 1844, Thackeray said that "the editor of this Magazine [*Fraser's*] had made a solemn condition with the writer of this notice that no pictures taken from the *Vicar of Wakefield* or *Gil Blas* should, by any favour or pretence, be noticed in this review." But, he continued, the success of Mulready's contribution, *The Whistonian Controversy*, forced him to disregard the placards thus inferentially posted at the beginning of the review, as they should have been at the entrance to the exhibition: VICARS OF WAKEFIELD NOT ADMITTED.8 The following year, doubtless taking its cue from Thackeray (unless it was Thackeray himself writing), *Punch* suggested that in the future a large room—the largest in the building except that devoted to portraits—be reserved for *Vicar* paintings.9

At first glance, the subject of *The Whistonian Controversy* would not seem of a kind to elicit much enthusiasm; it showed the Vicar and his old friend the Reverend Dr. Wilmot disputing a theological point, namely that a minister of the Church of England should not remarry after his first wife's death. (Wilmot was not without prejudice on the issue, since he was then courting his fourth wife.) Thackeray, however, praised the painting to the skies. "I believe this," he told *Fraser's* readers, "to be one of the finest cabinet pictures in the world . . . in drawing so admirable, in expression so fine, in finish so exquisite, in composition so beautiful, in humour and beauty of expression so delightful, that I can't but ask where is a good picture if this be not one."10 It was no accident that the very next year, at the British Institution, a minor artist displayed a painting entitled *The Vicar of Wakefield Reading His Favourite Whiston*.

Mulready followed up the success of his Whiston painting with *Choosing the Wedding Gown* (pl. 304). Commissioned by John Sheepshanks, it was—and is—an outstanding example of early Victorian literary genre art. The next year (1847) Mulready showed still another *Vicar* subject, *Burchell and Sophia* (also known as *The Haymaking*)—the man courting the coy girl by pretending to help her glean.

Maclise returned to the Moses-at-the-fair episode with *The Gross of
Thackeray gently parodied appreciative notices like this, possibly including some of his own, in a review by the journalist Frederick Bayham in *The Newcomes* (1853—54): “617. ‘Moses Bringing Home the Gross of Green Spectacles’. Smith, R. A.—Perhaps poor Goldsmith’s exquisite little work has never been so great a favourite as in the present age. We have here, in a work by one of our most eminent artists, an homage to the genius of him ‘who touched nothing which he did not adorn,’ and the charming subject is handled in the most delicious manner by Mr. Smith. The chiaroscuro is admirable: the impasto is perfect. Perhaps a very captious critic might object to the foreshortening of Moses’s left leg; but where there is so much to praise justly, the *Pall Mall Gazette* does not care to condemn” (chap. 22).

*Green Spectacles* (RA 1850). The press, with the conspicuous exception of *Blackwood’s Magazine*, was unanimous in its acclaim. The *Times’s* report was typical:

He has painted nothing more pleasant or more natural. Perhaps he has given the sheepish Moses an unwonted degree of roguishness and recklessness in that tremendous passage of his mercantile experience when it was established beyond all doubt that the price of the colt was a gross of green spectacles, not of silver; but the mild reproof of the vicar, the bewilderment of Mrs. Primrose, the terror of the elder brother, the sympathy of the sisters are inimitable. Everyone is in consternation but the baby—and he with more practical wisdom than his elders sees the glasses are green—and looks through them. This picture is one of Mr. Maclise’s happiest efforts, and it brings us back entirely to our own English ground.11*

At this point—the early 1850s—Sophia and Olivia, who usually had participated in larger compositions, were singled out for attention in a brief burst of sisterly figure studies. Ford Madox Brown had somewhat anticipated the vogue a few years earlier, when he painted, as one of his first essays in literary art, *Dr. Primrose and His Daughters* (pl. 80).

Understandably, in view of the affectionate familiarity with which people regarded both the *Vicar* text and its charmingly feckless author as he figured in the biographies of the time, reviewers were unusually insistent that artists be faithful to Goldsmith’s spirit and letter. This was the one criterion that could make or break each new entry in the *Vicar* competition. When a painter was judged to have succeeded, he would read, as Maclise did when he exhibited *The Gross of Green Spectacles*, that “if Goldie could himself see the amount of character embodied in this picture, he would most honestly confess himself outdone” (*Art Journal*) and “[the picture is] thoroughly imbued with the sentiment of Goldsmith” (* Examiner*).12 On the other hand, a *Blackwood’s* writer declared of the same picture, “Mr. Maclise must rely upon it that he lacks the keen perception of humour indispensable to the artist who would illustrate Goldsmith.”13 The “idealization” that art critics praised in some paintings of the period, from, say, *The Tempest* or *Comus*, was not acceptable in Goldsmith’s case, critics insisting instead on fidelity to his moderate realism. The *Athenaeum* said of a minor artist’s version of *Moses Going to Sell the Colt at the Fair* (1842): “. . . a work of great purity, grace, and simplicity, but with too much of the cold glazing of a china plate in its effect. All the details, too, of the cottage are flattered to a prettiness at variance with the novel. The vine-hung porch looks a perfect gate of Paradise, through which no temptations of any Squire Thornhill could have penetrated.”14

Although there no longer was talk of *Vicar* paintings taking over the exhibitions, some twenty more were hung in the ensuing decade and another twenty-five before the end of the century. Their continuing popularity owed something to the several dramatizations of the novel that were produced in those years. Two stage versions appeared in 1850 alone. The second act of Tom Taylor’s opened on a tableau based on Maclise’s familiar *Dressing Moses for the Fair* (RA 1838). Another adaptation, by W. H. Wills in 1878, starred Ellen Terry as Olivia, a role for which she was long and affectionately remembered.

Nearly all of the twenty recorded paintings from Goldsmith’s *The Deserted Village* were produced before 1850. The poem’s career in art began in a courteous exchange of compliments between Goldsmith and his friend Sir Joshua Reynolds. Goldsmith dedicated *The Deserted Village* to

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Reynolds, who responded by dedicating the engraving of his picture *Resignation* to Goldsmith. On the print were quoted these lines from the poem:

How blest is he who crowns in shades like these  
A youth of labour with an age of ease;  
Sinks to the grave with unperceiv’d decay,  
While *Resignation* gently slopes the way;  
And, all his prospects brightening to the last,  
His heaven commences ere the world be past.¹³

At the Royal Academy in 1800, William Hamilton and Francis Wheatley showed a total of five paintings from *The Deserted Village* that were engraved for DuRoveray’s edition of Goldsmith’s poetry; and eleven years later, Stothard exhibited his *Leaving Home*, from the same poem. Probably the best-received painting, however, was Frith’s *The Village Pastor* (pl. 305), commissioned by the ironmaster John Gibbons. Frith showed the beloved parson leaving the church after service surrounded by his family and his parishioners, including a timid child, a beautiful girl who is obviously the victim of a wasting illness, and in the background a group of Wilkiean village politicians. Thackeray found in the canvas “some senti-
ment of a very quiet, refined, Sir-Roger-de-Coverley-like sort—not too much of it . . . indicated rather than expressed . . . This is the sort of picture,” he concluded, “that is good to paint nowadays—kindly, beautiful, inspiring delicate sympathies, and awakening tender good-humour.”

A scene from *She Stoops to Conquer* was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1774, the year following its first performance. Except for an illustration Wheatley designed for *Bell's British Theatre* (pl. 25), there were few further paintings from the play until the early Victorian years. Between 1836 and 1898, however, owing in part to the popularity of other Goldsmith subjects, *She Stoops to Conquer* was active in the artist's repertory, some fifteen paintings being recorded. In 1856–59, three different painters exhibited at the Society of British Artists—two in one year—the identical moment when Miss Hardcastle, assuming the role of a barmaid, says to the preoccupied Marlow, “Did you call, Sir? Did your honour call?” The other favorite moment, in stage revivals as well as among artists, was one that Goldsmith had thriftyly repeated from *The Vicar of Wakefield*: Mrs. Hardcastle places her son Tony back to back with Miss Neville to compare their heights, and Tony seizes the opportunity to crack his thick skull against the girl's. In 1868, twenty-six years after his first *Measuring Heights* was enthusiastically received, Frith exercised a thrift of his own by repeating the subject, but this time alluding to the comedy rather than the novel.

**OSSIAN**

The British paintings inspired by what purported to be the “genuine remains” of a third-century Celtic bard named Ossian shared in a protracted international craze in literature and art. In 1762–63, one James MacPherson published *Fingal: An Epic Poem in Six Books* and *Temora* in eight books. These proceeded to captivate the imagination of western Europe. No matter that they were mostly MacPherson's invention, though ultimately based on genuine but wholly anonymous fragments of ancient story (in most modern reference books they are branded simply as a hoax); they seemed providentially sent to satisfy the age’s longing for an epic, the product of genius undefiled by civilization, to adorn Northern literature as Homer and Virgil had adorned the literatures of Greece and Rome. Wherever the developing Romantic spirit sought evidence of primitive poetic inspiration or nationalistic sentiment, as in Britain and France, a bard was required to personate either or both, and the fictitious Ossian admirably filled the bill. He was revered, translated, imitated, even dramatized; in London, between 1769 and 1793, there was a series of free stage adaptations called *The Fatal Discovery, The Captives, Comala, Oithona,* and *Oscar and Malvina* (the last-named being a pantomime, 1791).

Within a few years, Ossian's putative works had kindled an enthusiasm in Germany, France, Denmark, Italy, and Russia that can only be described as a particularly bizarre episode in the history of cultivated taste. Goethe admired Ossian, whom his hero Werther, reading him on the last night of his life, preferred to Homer; the “Primitifs” in Jacques-Louis David's studio sang his praises; Napoleon, whose favorite reading was Ossian in French translation, had his house at Malmaison decorated with scenes such as Girodet's *Ossian Receiving Napoleon's Generals*, which combined his own legend, still in the making, with that of the bard. “The dream of Ossian” was the subject of the ceiling Ingres was engaged to paint for the palace Napoleon expected to occupy in Rome.
Ossian was one of the most popular sources of British art in the period 1770–1810. In those four decades, some forty-five paintings from the poems are recorded, exceeded in number only by Shakespeare and Milton (if the contents of Fuseli's Milton Gallery are included). The Ossianic materials not only provided fresh heroic themes for neoclassic artists looking beyond the customary subjects from history or Shakespeare but offered a pretext for painting landscapes in the manner of Salvator Rosa. Horace Walpole wrote to Hannah More in 1784, "The flimsy giantry of Ossian has introduced mountainous horrors. The exhibitions at Somerset House are crowded with Brobdignag ghosts." While the fashion prevailed, subjects from Ossian were as popular with dyed-in-the-wool neoclassic artists as with those touched by the Romantic spirit. The incidence of Ossian paintings dropped sharply thereafter, with a marked hiatus between 1829 and 1856. The last few recorded, from 1856 to 1883, depicted not incidents in the legends but places traditionally associated with Ossian, his birthplace and grave. Insofar as Ossianic pictures were initially an expression of Scottish nationalism, they were pushed from the market by paintings from Scott, who was much more familiar to the common art lover, even in Scotland, than was MacPherson's bard; but as late as 1847, the fourteen-year-old Birmingham schoolboy Edward Jones (later Burne-Jones) shared a friend's copy of Ossian and, according to his wife, "They used to repeat it aloud when they walked about, taking parts as far as possible." "A very few years later," the artist himself recalled, "I was told it was a forgery and very deplorable even if it wasn't—bombastic and silly. But it couldn't be quite choked out of me and there was a forlorn note in it that gently broke my heart, like the blessed word 'Mesopotamia.'"

The most elaborate scheme to paint the matter of Ossian was Alexander Runciman's, who was said to have dreamed the same extravagant dream Henry Fuseli had—of painting frescoes that would rival those in the Sistine Chapel. Fuseli never achieved his transcendental tribute to Shakespeare, but Runciman realized his ambition to memorialize Ossian at Sir John Clerk's seat, Penicuik, a few miles south of Edinburgh. In 1771–72, he decorated the ceiling of Penicuik's great hall with a large oval of Ossian and Malvina seated before a large crowd and surrounded it with twelve individual subjects, forming a kind of pictorial epic. Several of these subjects, such as Cormar attacking the Spirit of the Waters, Fingal encountering the spirit of Loda, and the death of Ossian, became standard choices in subsequent Ossianic art. The frescoes were destroyed by fire in 1899, but several sketches survive at the National Gallery of Scotland.

One of the panels ("Elysium") in the famous series James Barry painted in the great room of the Society of Arts in London was from Ossian. Angelica Kauffmann exhibited Trenmore and Imbaca, also known as The Power of Love, from Fingal book 6, at the Royal Academy in 1773 (another version was sold in 1922, disguised as Armed Amazons); and a decade later, Maria Cosway displayed two Ossian subjects, Darthula Discovers Herself to Caribar her Lover (RA 1782) and "Althan stood in the wood alone . . ." (RA 1783).

SHERIDAN

The School for Scandal entered art as soon as it was staged: James Roberts's depiction of the screen scene (pl. 110) was hung at the Royal

*An allusion to the reputed power of that word, sonorously pronounced by the eighteenth-century evangelist George Whitefield, to induce a state of religious ecstasy in his susceptible auditors.
Academy in 1779, two years after the first performance, and Zoffany had a portrait of Robert Baddeley as Moses in the Academy show of 1781. But of the approximately twenty-five recorded paintings from the play (by contrast, The Rivals was represented only three or four times), most were the result of its sensational popularity in the 1870s. It ran for more than four hundred performances at the Vaudeville Theatre in 1872–73, after which Buckstone presented it at the Haymarket; and the next year, the Bancrofts revived it at still another house, the Prince of Wales'. In 1875, E. M. Ward's Lady Teazle Playing Her Father to Sleep was shown at the Royal Academy, and two subjects by lesser painters were at the Society of British Artists. The popularity of The School for Scandal in the galleries is a late example of the two-way traffic between art and the theater. The Bancrofts' production was celebrated for its lavish, period-perfect mounting; one critic, praising the brilliant setting in general, also admired the costumes and bearing of the actors, "who wear the look, indeed, of animated portraits of Gainsborough and Sir Joshua." During this period, as earlier, the most painted moment in the play was the climax of the screen scene (4.3). A number of pictures took their titles from Charles Surface's "Lady Teazle, by all that's wonderful!" as he throws down the screen.

Cowper

William Cowper's The Task (1785) charmed readers by its comfortable vignettes of rural retirement and quiet domesticity: the same qualities that then recommended, and would continue to recommend, The Vicar of Wakefield, for example. His modern bibliographer has called it "the most popular poem of its day with the reading public," noting that "the demand for his poems steadily increased during the years following his death [1800]. No other poet, with the exception of Scott and Byron, was so frequently reprinted and none had such a sustained run of popularity." Cowper was an early favorite of John Constable, who wrote in 1812 to his fiancée, Maria Bicknell, "How delighted I am that you are so fond of Cowper but how could it be otherwise—for he is the poet of Religion and Nature," and he was reading Southey's newly published life of the poet a few hours before he died suddenly in April 1837. Like Bunyan's, Cowper's popularity grew with the spread of Evangelicalism in the first half of the nineteenth century. But many more pictures were derived from The Pilgrim's Progress than from Cowper's poems. A dozen or so, nearly all before 1850, came from The Task and a mere handful from the other poems.

As early as the 1790s, Thomas Barker of Bath painted two pictures from The Task: The Woodman, which he sold to Macklin for engraving (the famous artist in wool, Miss Linwood, later produced a needlework version), and Crazy Kate, the subject of half of the other paintings from the poem (pl. 77). The most notable exercise in illustrating Cowper was Fuseli's, for Joseph Johnson's edition of the poet's works in 1805–6. It was not a happy matching of subject and artist. Conversation pieces such as Newsreading in the Country (The Task, 4.30–33) and Family Life in the Country ("Retirement," lines 189–90) were not Fuseli's forte. Leigh Hunt saw in the designs a chaos of mingled genius and absurdity, such as, perhaps, was never before seen. . . . A student reading in a garden is all over intensity of muscle; and the quiet tea-table scene in Cowper, he has turned into a preposterous conspiracy.
of huge men and women, all bent upon showing their thews and postures, with dresses as fantastical as their minds. One gentleman, of the existence of whose trowsers you are not aware till you see the terminating line at the ankle, is sitting and looking grim on a sofa, with his hat on and no waistcoat.³

As his admirer Haydon conceded, “When Fuseli attempted the domestic, as in his illustrations of Cowper, his total want of nature [human sympathies] stares one in the face, like the eyes of his own ghosts.”⁴ Crazy Kate, the popeyed subject of the frontispiece to the second volume, was more in Fuseli’s line.

E. M. Ward once painted John Gilpin Delayed by His Customers (RA 1851), a typical humorous piece showing the dandiacal Cheapside tradesman impatient to begin his journey as an elegantly dressed mother and daughter dawdle over their choice of dress materials and their escort yawns.⁵

The story of Cowper’s retired life at Olney, cared for by Mrs. Unwin and devoted to writing verse as a therapy for religious mania, was well known to nineteenth-century readers, initially through his friend Hayley’s biography (1803–4) and through his charming, though often enervated, letters, some of which were first published in Hayley’s book. As a subject of painting, Cowper’s life survived longer than did his verse. In the middle and later Victorian years, there was a small series of pictures representing him receiving his mother’s picture out of Norfolk (the subject of one of his best-liked occasional poems), pricking the flowers on his mother’s dress, and meditating in his garden, accompanied by his three cherished hares. A painting of this last subject by Henry Stacy Marks was sold in 1888.

CRABBE

The history of George Crabbe’s poems as subjects of paintings is a rather odd one, especially because of the disjunction between his critical fame and his delayed, and, as it turned out, brief occurrence in art.¹ He established himself as “the poet of the poor,” as his son called him, with
The wild ride of Cowper’s Cheapside linen draper, bereft of hat and wig, past the Bell Inn, Edmonton, where he has arranged to meet his wife and family to celebrate their twentieth wedding anniversary.

At Edmonton his loving wife
From the balcony spied
Her tender husband, wondering much
To see how he did ride.

Stop, stop John Gilpin!—Here’s the house—
They all at once did cry,
The dinner waits and we are tired,
Said Gilpin—So am I.

The Library (1781), The Village (1783), and The Newspaper (1785), but no paintings were then made from these narratives of rural life, written in thousands of relentless heroic couplets. With Goldsmith’s pleasantly sentimental Vicar of Wakefield to draw from, and Gainsborough’s and Morland’s genre art to imitate, artists must have regarded Crabbe’s realism as too grim to suit contemporary elegant taste; his ambition was, as he wrote in The Village, “to paint the cot / As truth will paint it, and as Bards will not.” After an absence of two decades, Crabbe returned to the public eye with his Poems (1807), including revised versions of his earlier work as well as a new poem, The Parish Register. This was followed by The Borough (1810), Tales in Verse (1812), and Tales of the Hall (1819), by which time his reputation had caught fire. For a short while, among contemporary poets only Scott, Moore, and eventually Byron surpassed him in critical esteem. In 1818, the publisher John Murray paid £3,000 for the copyright of his works, the same price that Moore had received two years earlier for Lalla Rookh. “Crabbe’s the man,” Byron told Murray, despite the fact that “he has got a coarse and impracticable subject.”2 “Truth,” he wrote in “English Bards and Scotch Reviewers,”
Wordsworth, whose *Excursion*, said one reviewer, was "sketched with all the truth of Crabbe's descriptive pencil," said that Crabbe's works would "last, from their combined merits as Poetry and Truth full as long as any thing that has been expressed in Verse since they first made their appearance"—including all the productions of the English Romantic poets down to 1815.

As we saw in chapter 3, the publication of Crabbe's successive volumes between 1807 and 1819 touched off a critical debate on the admissibility and limits of realism in poetry. In the course of this debate, and in other reviews, critics likened Crabbe's poetry to painting more insistently than they did, then or later, in the case of any other poet of comparable stature. It quickly became a platitude to praise him as the English poetic heir of the Dutch genre painters, as well as to link him with Hogarth. As Thomas Noon Talfourd said in 1815, "It is true that in his minute representations of hard-hearted villainy, he has often bordered on the shocking and disgustful; but there will generally be found, as in the works of Hogarth, some kind of gentle touch which sobers the whole scene. . . ."

Yet despite these clear signals to artists that Crabbe's tales were a reservoir of subjects, especially now that David Wilkie was making relatively unidealized rural genre painting fashionable, only four pictures are recorded down to the late 1830s: Henry Singleton's two subjects from *The Borough*, *Peter Grimes* (RA 1812) and *Ellen Orford* (BI 1813), T. M. Simpson's *Edward Shore*, from *Tales in Verse* (RA 1813), and Henry Corbould's *The Parting Hour* (RA 1826, BI 1828). By that time, Crabbe's critical reputation had already declined, though in years to come Tennyson would still value him, as did Crabbe's fellow-Suffolkman, Edward FitzGerald, and still later Newman, Ruskin, Rossetti, Clough, and George Eliot. But when the eight-volume collection of his poems appeared in 1834, John Gibson Lockhart observed that despite the consensus of "every one of his eminent contemporaries" that he belonged "in the very highest rank of excellence, Crabbe has never yet become familiar to hundreds of thousands of English readers well qualified to appreciate and enjoy his merits."

Only at this point, ironically, did Crabbe's fortunes in the art world improve. His fame there remained modest, but between 1838 and 1849, a dozen paintings were credited to his poems. Most of them were pictures of two heroines, Ellen Orford (*The Borough*) and Phoebe Dawson (*The Parish Register*); two portraits of the latter, indeed, were exhibited as late as 1867 (BI) and 1874 (RA). The rest were portrayals of a few sentimental or pathetic situations, including George B. O'Neill's *The Foundling*, from *The Parish Register* (pl. 48).

Why were so few pictures taken from Crabbe? Despite the applause of reviewers in his post-*Borough* years and the liberality with which they suggested subjects in his poems that awaited the artist's pencil, it is likely that, as a practical matter, too many of those subjects were "painful" or "disgusting" (both terms occurred often in the reviews). The main charge against Crabbe was that his rural realism, far from being Goldsmith-
idyllic, was too brutal, unsettling, repulsive. There was nothing agreeably picturesque or sentimental in his poems, and only a few characters, notably Ellen Orford, were qualified for artistic treatment because their stories were pathetic. In Crabbe's case, as in that of a number of other English writers, many subjects presented themselves, but few, in the event, were chosen.

ROGERS

The wealthy poet-connoisseur Samuel Rogers, whose home in St. James's Place housed a famous art collection, occupies a peripheral place in the history of both literature and painting. His reputation as a poet, at first the product of genuine admiration but later kept alive by artificial means, rested on no solid grounds. 1 Fuseli expressed an increasingly common opinion when he observed in 1812, "He never wrote a line of Poetry in his life, all His good lines are Copies from Poets, and in His 'Pleasures of Memory' He begins with Gray" 2—as if there had been no earlier poets worth mentioning. The Pleasures of Memory (1792), a frigid versifying of the theory of associationism laden with personifications and heroic couplets, was one of the most popular poems of its day; by 1816, some 23,000 copies, a great quantity for the time, had been sold. Mary Ann Flaxman, the half-sister of one well-known artist, and Maria Cosway, the wife of another, displayed a pair of pictures from the poem at the Royal Academy in 1800; and in 1819, Miss Flaxman exhibited a picture of Maternal Piety from Rogers's Human Life, which had just appeared.

Rogers's poetry was represented in the art exhibitions between 1830 and 1860 by some twenty-five pictures, most bearing quotations from his series of meditative and anecdotal poems published in 1822 and 1828 under the title Italy. Comparing unfavorably, as it did, with the fourth canto of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, which was of a somewhat similar cast, Italy met with no success. But Rogers, as one of Stothard's biographers rather cattily wrote, "was in the happy and rare position of at once holding his own poetry in high estimation, and of possessing the means of presenting it to the world with all the added attractions which art could provide for it." 3 Burning the unsold copies of the first edition, he undertook to prepare a new one, enlarged, revised and, above all, lavishly illustrated, at a cost of £7,335—a true fortune. From Stothard, who had illustrated the fifth edition of The Pleasures of Memory, he commissioned twenty designs, and from Turner, twenty-four. The resulting volume (1830) was a landmark in the history of the illustrated book. 4 It sold 4,000 copies in the first fortnight, largely on the strength of Turner's small landscape vignettes; Turner, it was said, "supplied the poetry, and Rogers the prose." 5 A copy of Italy given him by his father's partner in the wine-importing business opened the thirteen-year-old John Ruskin's eyes to the power of the artist of whom he was soon to be the eloquent champion. "This book," he wrote toward the end of his life, "was the first means I had of looking carefully at Turner's work: and I might, not without some appearance of reason, attribute to this gift the entire direction of my life energies." 6

In 1834, Rogers republished his 1812 volume of Poems in an edition embellished with thirty-three designs by Turner. Italy and the Poems together cost him £10,000, and they made their way into upper-class homes in a variety of forms, all sumptuous: octavo, quarto, or duodecimo, bound
in morocco with gilt fore-edges. None of his contemporaries, says a modern student, "had a reputation so spectacularly restored to life." But it was on the strength of the illustrations, not the text. When Scott praised *Italy* as "a rare specimen of the manner in which the art of Poetry can awaken the Muse of painting" and Macaulay told the aged poet that "if your 'Italy' were dug up in some Pompeii or Herculaneum two thousand years hence, it would give to posterity a higher idea of the state of the arts amongst us than anything else which lay in an equally small compass," both men evaded committing themselves on the merits of the poems. As the free-spoken Lady Blessington is said to have remarked, both volumes "would have been dished if it had not been for the plates."

It was the snob appeal of Rogers's poems in their luxurious packaging that was at least partially responsible for their popularity among artists. In addition to the many Italian scenes embellished with quotations from the poem, *Italy* inspired in the next two decades some dozen paintings taken directly from the text. Most of these depicted Ginevra, the girl who hides in a chest during Christmas revels and suffocates—a story familiar from sources as diverse as Schiller, balladry, and, though few picture-collectors would have been found in such an audience, plays like *The Mistletoe Bough; or, The Fatal Chest*, performed at a Whitechapel theater in 1834. Two or three other paintings portrayed the story of Bianca Capello, another "oft-told tale" of elopement and assassination to which Rogers briefly referred.

**Burns**

Robert Burns's association with literary pictures began with an incident in his own lifetime. Sir Walter Scott recalled meeting the peasant-poet in Edinburgh in 1786 or 1787, a symbolic event—the fleeting conjunction of Scotland's greatest poets—commemorated in more than one Victorian painting.

The only thing I remember which was remarkable in Burns' manner [Scott told his biographer John Gibson Lockhart], was the effect produced upon him by a print of Bunbury's, representing a soldier lying dead on the snow, his dog sitting in misery on the one side, on the other his widow, with a child in her arms. These lines were written beneath,—

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Cold on Canadian hills, or Minden's plain,
Perhaps that parent wept her soldier slain;
Bent o'er her babe, her eye dissolved in dew,
The big drops, mingling with the milk he drew,
Gave the sad presage of his future years,
The child of misery baptized in tears.
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Burns seemed much affected by the print, or rather the ideas which it suggested to his mind. He actually shed tears. He asked whose the lines were, and it chanced that nobody but myself remembered that they occur in a half-forgotten poem of Langhorne's, called by the unpromising title of "The Justice of the Peace."* I whispered my information to a friend present, who mentioned it to Burns, who rewarded me with a look and a word, which, though of mere civility, I then received, and still recollect, with very great pleasure.¹

*A dead soldier, his wife and child" was shortly to become the subject of a better known picture by Joseph Wright of Derby, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1789 (pi. 9).²

Burns's first illustrator was the leading Scottish artist of the day, David Allan, whose designs for Ramsay's *The Gentle Shepherd* he admired. Allan

Montz Retzsch's Flaxman-like outline drawings, especially of Shakespearean subjects, were then popular.

During Burns's lifetime, his fame was largely confined to Scotland. His use of the Lowland Scots dialect, to say nothing of his irreverent spirit and populist themes, did not commend his poems to most English readers, and such notices as they received in England were only mildly appreciative. In addition, the poems had been published in chapbooks, broadsides, and scattered and obscure song collections such as Thomson's; and it was not until 1800, with the appearance of Currie's collected (but incomplete) edition, that they became conveniently available. At that point, English interest in Burns quickened; and within a year, Julius Caesar Ibbetson painted two pictures, now lost, from "Duncan Gray cam' here to woo" and "The Cotter's Saturday Night"—the latter immediately establishing itself as the most popular Burns subject in art, as it was the most popular poem among English readers. "Tam o' Shanter" and "Hallow E'en" were first drawn upon in 1805, again by Ibbetson, who exhibited paintings from them in that year's Royal Academy. Soon thereafter, the Burns cult began to develop, primarily to feast on haggis and drink his health each year on the anniversary of his birth (25 January) and eventually to spread his fame throughout the English-speaking world. "Search Scotland over, from the Pentland to the Solway," wrote Lockhart in his life of Burns (1828), "and there is not a cottage-hut so poor and wretched as to be without its Bible; and hardly one that, on the same shelf, and next to it, does not treasure a Burns."

From the very beginning, Burns's poems were likened to paintings. The first influential critical notice they received, by Henry Mackenzie in The Lounger (1786), remarked of "To a Mountain Daisy," "Such strokes as these mark the pencil of the poet, which delineates Nature with the precision of intimacy, yet with the delicate colouring of beauty and of taste. The power of genius is not less admirable in tracing the manners, than in painting the passions, or in drawing the scenery of Nature." Echoed Carlyle four decades later: "No poet of any age or nation is more graphic than Burns: the characteristic features disclose themselves to him at a glance; three lines from his hand, and we have a likeness. And, in that rough dialect, in that rude, often awkward metre, so clear and definite a likeness! It seems a draughtsman working with a burnt stick; and yet the burin of a Retzsch* is not more expressive or exact."

To some critics, Burns's genius for making word pictures, like that of Shakespeare and Milton, left no room for illustration. "Let no man paint after Burns," said Hazlitt. "He held the pencil in his own hands." But the admonition came too late. Alexander Carse's picture The Borough—Market Day, from "Tam o' Shanter" (RA 1815), which prompted Hazlitt's remark, belonged to a tide that had begun with Ibbetson's pictures a decade earlier and was destined to swell inexorably for many more. Making pictures from Burns became a prosperous cottage industry—in view of their genre subjects, the term is especially fitting—both north and south of the Tweed. In addition to easel paintings, leading artists were commissioned to illustrate edition after edition of Burns's poems, among them the ever-adaptable Thomas Stothard and, in later generations, John Faed and Sam Bough. Many of the paintings and drawings that served as
originals of the printed illustrations were exhibited in the customary places. Although pictures from Burns were seen there less often in the last third of the century, a number of competent artists, notably James Elder Christie, supplied the continuing demand.

Hundreds of pictures were equipped with quotations from Burns; in fact, only Shakespeare, Tennyson, Thomson, and Byron exceeded him in the frequency of mottoes. In the course of a parody review of the 1844 Royal Academy show, Thackeray mentioned a fictitious painting entitled *The Highland Luncheon*, which he said came equipped with the epigraph,

"Gin a' the binks that fa' your body,
Your bubbly Jock and winsome poodie,
Your liling, filting, linkum doddie,
Should gar your ee.

"The words of the Ayrshire bard," remarked the grave critic, "were never more admirably illustrated." 9

The two poems most discussed in the early criticism of Burns were the two that were most often painted: "The Cotter's Saturday Night" and "Tam o' Shanter." It was probably no accident that these were also the subjects of Allan's best-known illustrations. "There is in that immortal poem," wrote John Wilson of "The Cotter's Saturday Night," "a depth of domestic joy—an intensity of the feeling of home—a presiding spirit of love—and a lofty enthusiasm of religion, which are all peculiarly Scottish, and beyond the pitch of mind of any other people." 10 "Tam o' Shanter" was popular for diametrically opposed reasons. It offered opportunities to paint horses, Dutch burgher-like inebriety (pl. 65), and diablerie. "The gothic architecture of the old Kirk at Alloway," wrote someone who had seen Ibbetson's version of the subject before it disappeared into the collection of an American naval officer, "gives a sacred setting which by contrast heightens the effect of the monstrous orgies. A blaze of unearthly,
For Nannie, far before the eest,
Hard upon noble Maggie prest,
And flew at Tam wi’ furious ettle;
But little wist she Maggie’s mettle—
Ae spring brought aff her master hale,
But left behind her ain grey tail.

ruddy light streams from the murky gloom and tinges the characters on the stage. The spectator and his steed alone are of this world. . . .”

Half a century later, George Cruikshank exhibited (RA 1852) a version of “Tam o’ Shanter” that must have absolutely out-Fuselied Fuseli.

. . . The warlocks and witches, the coffins and candles, the tomahawks and scimitars, the music maker himself, “black, grim, and large” [said a reviewer], are all there; with legions of lesser imps, who stream up in the flames, swarm in the rafters, and wing the murky air, according to the well known habits of those fragmentary impersonations of evil. Conjure up what visions he will the reader’s fancy . . . will be outdone by the rush and hurry, the tumult and storm, the madness and mirth of this infernal scene.12

In third place among the Burns subjects most favored by artists was “John Anderson, My Jo,” of which a dozen or more paintings were exhibited between 1832 and 1870. Like “The Cotter’s Saturday Night,” it was beloved for domestic sentiment, in this case the portrayal of placid old age, marital affection preserved to the end. The appeal of such heartwarming domestic tableaux knew no boundaries; it was as compelling in London as in Edinburgh.
The most celebrated Burns painting was Wilkie's *The Refusal* (pl. 44) from "Duncan Gray." The *Literary Gazette’s* welcome was typical:

The principal persons in this little drama of art [the 1818 version] are perfect; so much so as to produce a desire in the mind of the beholder to follow them into after-life, and to anticipate, from the disdain and coquetry so exquisitely depicted in the countenance of Maggie, and the disappointment swelling into anger in that of her lover, that their marriage state will be chequered by a few storms, at least (for we are amiable critics) will not be allowed to stagnate. . . . The story is pointed and sarcastic, with sufficient of humorous incident to correct the spirit of satire upon so serious a subject as *lovemaking.*

Like Scott, Burns was a constant source of subjects, or at least faint tie-ins, for landscape painters. Contemporary criticism often alluded to the poetic truth of his Scottish settings, and artists like David Octavius Hill, who supplied a series of illustrations for "Christopher North’s" *Land of Burns,* took advantage of the praise to offer topographical canvases with no attempt to reproduce the scenes as they were in Burns’s day. Even the most tenuous association with the poet was invoked in albums and separate paintings depicting the Scottish scene. In 1838, for example, what must have been a perfectly routine landscape-cum-genre subject was described in the Royal Academy catalogue as "a scene in Glen Esk, Forfarshire, after a good day’s sport. . . . On the table is the celebrated bowl, once the property of Robert Burns." (This was one of the innumerable drinking utensils, attributed on dubious authority to the poet, which were prized as hallowed relics during the nineteenth century).

Pictures from Burns were more numerous than those taken from any other poet’s oeuvre of a similar size. But in proportion to their number, they probably included fewer memorable or otherwise significant paintings than did any comparable group. The Burns cult was a popular but parochial phenomenon, reflecting a grass-roots literary taste that was not much shared by the more cultivated part of the reading public. Consequently, paintings of Burns themes were not likely to be bought by the major collectors of contemporary art, whose tastes ran instead to Shakespeare, Goldsmith, and Sterne. Apart from the countless engravings, not many illustrations of Burns survive; Wilkie’s *The Refusal* is one of the few Burns oils to be found on gallery walls today, however thickly they populated the exhibitions in their time.