THE VICTORIAN ERA

TENNYSON

From 1850 to the end of the Victorian era, Alfred Tennyson, in collaboration with Shakespeare and Scott, largely supported the literary picture industry. In the decades of decline after 1870, when most authors' works gradually vanished from the exhibitions, paintings with subjects from Tennyson, or adorned with quotations from his poetry (only Shakespeare supplied more), were produced in quantity, year after year. The corpus of his poetry, still growing, offered a rich choice of subjects. In the three hundred and more recorded paintings, about fifty poems were represented, some as many as forty times.

When Tennyson became laureate in 1850, he had been a published poet for two decades. As early as 1834, four years after the appearance of his first independent (and badly received) volume, Poems, Chiefly Lyrical, an obscure landscape artist named Henry F. Worsley showed at the British Institution a picture titled The Water Mill, from Tennyson. But it was not until after 1842, when the publication of a two-volume collection of his poetry laid the basis of his critical fame, that Tennyson began to be represented more or less regularly in the exhibitions. In 1843, James Eckford Lauder showed a Mariana at the Royal Scottish Academy; this did not bear an explicit reference to Tennyson's poem, though it is reasonable to assume that well-read spectators would have associated the two. In 1847, Richard Redgrave showed another Mariana at the British Institution, with a quotation from the poem. Tennyson's name seems to have first appeared in the Royal Academy's catalogue in 1849, when a painting "From Tennyson's ballad of the May Queen" was exhibited by Roger Fenton, an artist who was soon to abandon the studio for the darkroom as a pioneer photographer, part of whose experience in the new art was obtained in the Crimea. He would have been particularly well qualified to illustrate "The Charge of the Light Brigade," as other artists did from time to time.

Even before the turning point of 1842, Tennyson's name had been invoked in art criticism. The Athenaeum in its coverage of the 1841 season had said of Francis Danby's The Enchanted Castle that "it is a picture to which Tennyson might write a ballad—so rich an air of faëryism is diffused over it." Conversely, his early reviewers repeatedly described his poetic art in terms of painting. One of the first, W. J. Fox, wrote of his 1830 volume, using a grotesque figure:

He seems to obtain entrance into a mind as he would make his way into a landscape; he climbs the pineal gland as if it were a hill in the centre of the scene; looks around on all objects with their varieties of form, their movements, their shades of colour, and their mutual relations and influences; and forthwith produces as graphic a delineation in the one case as Wilson or Gainsborough could have done in the other, to the great enrichment of our gallery of intellectual scenery.

In 1848, in the course of what was surely one of the most extravagant bouquets of praise tossed to any nineteenth-century poet, the "Ettrick Shepherd" (James Hogg) was inspired by Tennyson's "The Palace of Art" to declare, "You roam in restless wonder with this mighty painter, who combines the distinctive palpable power of individualizing and grouping possessed by Raphael, the grandeur of M. Angelo, and the richness of
337. William Maw Egley, *The Lady of Shalott* (British Institution 1858) (Sheffield City Art Galleries). "Flagrant Pre-Raphaelitism," said the *Athenæum* (13 February), showing how widely the "disease" had spread in ten years. Critics who disliked the newly fashionable detailed style, whether or not the artist in question was associated with the Rossetti circle or avowed his sympathy with its ideals, found the label an ever handy form of castigation.

338. William Holman Hunt, *The Lady of Shalott* (1886) (City Art Gallery, Manchester). A sketch, based on one of Hunt's designs for the Moxon edition of Tennyson's poems (1857), for a painting that would be finished only in 1905. (It is now at the Wadsworth Athenæum, Hartford, Connecticut.) Hunt wrote a long allegorical exegesis beginning "The parable [of the poem], as interpreted in this painting, illustrates the failure of a human Soul towards its accepted responsibility. The Lady typifying the Soul is bound to represent faithfully the workings of the high purpose of King Arthur's rule" (Bennett, *William Holman Hunt*, p. 57). Not all treatments of this familiar subject were so laden with systematic symbolism.

Titian's vehicle, together with the softness of Claude, through all the gradations and changes of nature's aspects."

Despite this admiration of Tennyson's pictorialism, it was not until 1850 that artists generally began to realize the rich illustrative possibilities his poetry contained. By coincidence, two paintings bearing quotations, one from "The Gardener's Daughter" and the other from "The Mermaid," were hanging in the Royal Academy's summer exhibition at the moment *In Memoriam* was published on the first of June. Two others, from "Mariana" and "The Beggar Maid," had appeared at the British Institution in February. Thus, to the three major events of that wonderful year in the poet's life—the appearance of *In Memoriam*, which was to sell 60,000 copies within a few months and instantly establish Tennyson as the nation's favorite poet; his fortunate marriage; and his receiving, in November, the laureateship—may well be added a fourth, his decisive discovery by painters.

*In Memoriam* abounds with domestic scenes and images from nature, including landscapes, that would seem to have been ready-made to be transferred to Victorian canvases, but surprisingly few were actually chosen. The poem was represented in the exhibitions almost entirely by way of quotations appended to genre and anecdotal pictures dealing with death and remembrance in nonliterary contexts. Instead, during the 1850s the artists drew from the contents of the 1842 volumes, and their initial choice was to determine which of Tennyson's shorter poems the painters selected, and presumably the market demanded, as long as the Tennysonian vogue lasted. The two favorite poems, each represented by at least thirty-five recorded versions down to 1900, were "The Lady of Shalott" and "Mariana in the Moated Grange."

Between 1852 and 1859 alone, seven interpretations of "The Lady of Shalott" were painted, among the earliest being that by Tennyson's pas-
sonian admiring James Smetham, which was rejected by the Royal Academy and eventually found its way to a private collection in South Africa. Henry Darvall's was denounced as "a most injudicious choice of a subject, as provoking an unfavourable comparison between the present work and an exquisite version of the subject exhibited elsewhere last season," by which supposedly was meant Robert Scott Lauder's at the National Exhibition in Portland Place. William Maw Egley's version (pl. 337) was dismissed as "flagrant Pre-Raphaelitism"—a risk of guilt-by-association every painter was to face after the publication the preceding summer of Moxon's Illustrated Edition, with its designs by, among other contributors, Rossetti, Millais, and Holman Hunt (chapter 11, above). Arthur Hughes and Hunt (pl. 338) later painted oils of the same subject that can be jointly confronted in Manchester. Notwithstanding the reviewers' frequently expressed impatience and boredom, leading artists continued to paint those same trite scenes for forty years.

339. John W. Waterhouse, The Lady of Shalott (RA 1888) (Tate Gallery, London). One of Waterhouse's several treatments of the subject, and the biggest (60 3/4 x 78 3/4 inches). In 1894 the artist exhibited a painting of the scene previously depicted by Egley (pl. 337) and Hunt (pl. 338).

340. George Boughton, The Road to Camelot (RA 1898) (Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool). Most paintings from "The Lady of Shalott" portrayed the lady herself in the tower. This late example of Tennysonian art, however, shows what she saw in her mirror—"the red cloaks of market girls," "a troop of damsels glad," a "long-haired page in crimson clad," and "knights ... riding two and two."

*In subsequent criticism of paintings from Tennyson, the Moxon illustrations were sometimes alluded to for purposes of comparison. For better or worse, because they appeared in an edition with which the poet was closely associated, they came to be regarded as "definitive" or at least (but erroneously) as author-approved. It would be interesting to know just how much effect they had on the pictures that came after.
The Lady of Shalott's close rival for the distinction of being the most banal Tennysonian subject in art was Mariana (in the Moated Grange). Probably the best-abused of the lot was one of the earliest, Millais's (RA 1851). The Examiner's opinion was typical: "The figure is neither beautiful nor expressive of the sentiment: it is the weariness of the body, rather than of the soul, so well expressed in the lines, 'My life is dreary—He cometh not, she said.' " The quotation itself quickly became a cliché in exhibition catalogues; it was attached to scores of portraits of—as a critic of one such picture put it in 1863—"that numerous class of young ladies found in all exhibitions, looking longingly into vacancy, and exclaiming in the words of Tennyson, after the approved fashion, 'He cometh not, she said!' " Just as no radiantly expectant young woman in Victorian sentimental portraiture was without her line from Romeo and Juliet, so no disappointed one came on display without hers from Tennyson.

From the beginning of Tennyson's popularity among artists, he was valued for his poems for common life, the literary equivalent of genre paintings. It might almost be said that he was a genre painter manqué. As John Dixon Hunt has pointed out, numerous nonliterary Victorian paintings of incidents from domestic life might well be read as implicitly illustrating various passages in Tennyson's poems, particularly the group he called "English Idyls." More pictures were specifically derived from these than from any other category except the Arthurian Idylls.

Among these studies of domestic life, two were favored above all others after 1850: "Dora" and "The Gardener's Daughter." "Dora," painted at least fifteen times between 1852 and 1885, was valued both for its adaptability to sentimental portraiture, as in William McTaggart's Royal Scottish Academy diploma picture (1868) of a mother crowning her little boy with a floral wreath, described in lines 78–82 of the poem, and for its pathetic Wordsworth-type incident. The three Dora paintings exhibited at the Royal Academy in a single year (1863) portrayed virtually the same moment in the poem.

As usual, a certain number of Dora pictures were female portraits, with no reference to Tennyson's poem apart from the exploitation of its title. Most of the pictures exhibited as "The Gardener's Daughter" must have been of the same kind. The full title of Tennyson's poem was "The Gardener's Daughter, or The Pictures," and its framing subject was two pictures, each painted by one of two artist friends who had been charmed by the lovely heroine. Hence the exhibited portraits of Rose, the gardener's daughter, may nominally have been realizations of the portraits in the poem, or at least of the model as first seen, standing at the door of her father's cottage, plucking roses from the arbor. But few of the thirty-odd recorded paintings called The Gardener's Daughter bore a credit line to Tennyson. One explanation might be that his poem was so well known that a picture bearing its title would automatically recall its story. Another is that many of the unattributed examples did not, in fact, have an intended reference to Tennyson, belonging instead to the large category of popular art that lay parallel to poetry of the kind exemplified by the English idyls. When he chose titles like "The Gardener's Daughter" and "The Miller's Daughter," Tennyson was not so much innovating as emulating—copying the current practice of run-of-the-mine Victorian genre illustrators. Rustic "daughters" of various sorts were well established as stock figures in sentimental portraiture by the time Tennyson came to write about them.
Some twenty pictures bore the title of his poem “The Miller’s Daughter” (1832, much revised 1842), but few if any alluded explicitly to the poem itself. “Monk” Lewis, the celebrated writer of horror novels, wrote a ballad “The Miller’s Daughter,” a melancholy tale of a girl who drowned herself for love, which retained its popularity on the music racks in Victorian drawing rooms. Plays with that title were performed in 1804 and 1818. Tennyson’s title was already generic when he chose it, and how many of the miller’s daughter pictures actually came from his poem cannot be determined; most, as a matter of fact, were exhibited without specific reference to Tennyson. Insofar as they were anything more than sentimental portraits, which story line did they portray—Lewis’s of the suicidal girl in the millstream or Tennyson’s happier one? The poet’s early critic, John Wilson Croker, wrote: “Miller’s daughters, poor things, have been so generally betrayed by their sweethearts, that it is refreshing to find that Mr. Tennyson has united himself to his miller’s daughter in lawful wedlock.” Tennyson’s poem helped sustain the subject—or at least the title’s—popularity down to the end of the century. At the exhibition of the Society of British Artists as late as 1891, no fewer than four miller’s daughters were on display.

Lady Godiva, too, was a subject already known in art before Tennyson published his poetic version of the legend in 1842. In 1833 and 1836, George Jones had shown his companion pieces, Lady Godiva Preparing to Ride through Coventry (pl. 342) and Lady Godiva’s Return, at the Royal Academy. Frederick Pickering’s Peeping Tom was hung there, with a prose gloss, in 1842, just as the first reviews of Tennyson’s collection were appearing. In 1846, the first Godiva picture to bear a quotation from the poem was presented to the public at the British Institution. It was doubtless merely an accident, with no direct bearing on Tennyson’s poem, that in the same year, and again in 1848, a play called Lady Godiva and Peeping Tom of Coventry was seen in London, an obvious attempt to capitalize on the current vogue of *tableaux vivants*, which featured immobile groups of actors and actresses depicting famous paintings. The tight fleshings they wore came as close to nudity as the Victorian stage allowed.* And this, of course, remained the attraction of the Godiva theme. “Almost any semi-nude female study,” commented the *Art Journal* when it reviewed A. J. Woolmer’s canvas of 1856, “may be turned into a Godiva,” especially, one might add, if a horse were included. (Godiva was shown in various stages of nudity. In Jones’s picture of her preparing for her ride, she was letting her hair down and *about* to doff her filmy attire—the sort of titillating pose with which Victorian artists often evaded the conventions. Edmund Blair Leighton’s fully clothed Godiva at the Royal Academy in 1892 would seem to have been rather pointless.) Few of the pictures of the Coventry heroine after the 1850s referred explicitly to Tennyson’s poem, perhaps because his revered status discouraged associating him with what a critic of G. F. Watts’s picture (RA 1900) called “the succession of commonplace nudities for which the story has afforded an excuse.”

Another poem in the 1842 collection made a similarly oblique contribution to the mid-Victorian fund of art subjects. The title of “The May Queen,” lastingly notorious for its lines “You must wake and call me early, call me early, mother dear; . . . For I’m to be Queen o’ the May, mother, I’m to be Queen o’ the May,” was given to some fifteen paintings. The first (1849) quoted from the poem, as did two or three others. But most pictures bearing the title seem not to have depicted the pathetic story told

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*The leading producer of *tableaux vivants* at that time was one Madame Warton, whose Christmas program for 1847 was advertised as featuring a live-actress portrayal of Lady Godiva, “from Edwin Landseer R.A.’s forthcoming picture.” This bit of art-world news was no casual show-business invention: Landseer was indeed working on a Godiva painting, but, learning a year or two later that several other pictures of the same subject were under way, he put his own aside (Oliver Beckett, *J. F. Herring & Sons* [London, 1981], p. 57). The picture, *Lady Godiva at Prayer* (which may or may not have been the pose in which Madame Warton’s actress was seen), eventually was finished and found its way to the Academy exhibition of 1866.
Edward Burne-Jones, *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* (Grosvenor Gallery 1884) (Tate Gallery, London). Of the lady in this second version of the subject by Burne-Jones (the first was painted in 1862), the *Saturday Review* said (3 May), "[She] does not in any way answer to Tennyson's heroine." True: she was drawn from the beggar maid in the old ballad printed in Bishop Percy's collection rather than from Tennyson's poem, as the first had been. But most of the people who admired the picture at the Grosvenor Gallery would have seen it as an illustration of Tennyson rather than of an old ballad.

One poem in the 1842 collection had strong artistic rather than literary resonances. The Ovidian judgment of Paris theme, a familiar one in Renaissance art, was chosen from time to time by British painters aspiring to the high style; in 1826, for example, William Etty exhibited his version (pl. 134) at the Royal Academy. Six years later, Tennyson published his poetic treatment under the title of "Oenone." Reprinted, much improved, in the 1842 collection, the poem's remembrance of artistic treatments of the judgment of Paris was immediately recognized. Leigh Hunt wrote that "Oenone lamenting the infidelity of Paris is as beautiful and graceful as if it had been painted by one of the Italian masters."

For the rest of the century, Tennyson's poem invited painters to revert to the classic theme under the auspices of English literature. A dozen paintings were titled simply *Oenone*. A few doubtless depicted the tableau of the judgment itself, but most seem to have been more or less sensuous portraits or figure studies of the wronged woman, against a lush background suggestive of Spenser and Keats. G. F. Watts painted the subject on three separate occasions late in the century (pl. 166).

Of the remaining poems in the 1842 collection, two, "The Talking Oak" and "The Lady Clare," inspired half a dozen pictures each; their Tennysonian origin is definite except insofar as one or two "Lady Clare" paintings may have referred to the character of the same name in Scott's *Marmion*. The indebtedness to Tennyson's poem of several pictures exhibited as "A Dream of Fair Women," two of them by Edward Armitage (RA 1872, 1874), may have extended no further than the title.

After 1850, Tennyson published hundreds of short and medium-length poems, only two of which, *Maud* (1855) and "Enoch Arden" (1864), were represented by more than one or two pictures; each inspired half a dozen. With only one or two exceptions, paintings from *Maud* evaded the story line (a frustrated lover driven to madness and finding his
mental if not moral salvation in the Crimean War) and seized instead on
the lyric "Come into the garden, Maud." One Enoch Arden painting, by
William McTaggart (RA 1867), used the opening scene of the poem as a
pretext for portraying three children building a sand castle on the beach.

In 1859, the first four *Idylls of the King* (*Enid*, *Vivien*, *Elaine*, and
*Guinevere*) were published. Although, as we have seen, pictures from
Tennyson were by no means lacking in the 1850s, it was with the
appearance of the *Idylls* that he began to be a truly dominating presence
in the exhibition rooms. Artists not previously attracted to Tennyson now
discovered him; Swinburne later remembered how, when the first four
poems appeared, "one of the greatest painters now [1886] living pointed
out to me, with a brief word of rapturous admiration, the wonderful
breadth of beauty and the perfect force of truth in a single verse of
'Elaine'—'And white sails flying on the yellow sea.'"\(^{17}\)

Although Tennyson unquestionably was responsible for the wide pop­
ularity of the Arthurian stories in art, he was not the first to attract
painters to them. As has been seen in chapter 8, Arthurian material was
used in Dyce's allegorical frescoes in the Houses of Parliament beginning
about 1849, and, more important, the Pre-Raphaelites, enchanted by
Malory, had already painted a number of pictures from him, including
the evanescent Oxford Debating Union frescoes (1857). (It is perhaps
insufficiently appreciated how much Tennyson's decision to take up the
matter of Arthur—a project he had contemplated early in his career and
then dropped—may have been due to these developments in the 1850s.)
The effect of the *Idylls* was to provide artists with an alternative source to
Malory, whose developing popularity, far from being diminished, was in
fact enhanced by that of Tennyson's narratives.

In the decade 1860–69 alone, fifty or sixty paintings of Arthurian
subjects were presented to the public, eight of them—so instantaneous
was the success of the first *Idylls*—in the year immediately following the
book's publication, and another eight, five of which were at the Royal
Academy, the next year (1861). All but ten or so were from Tennyson,
most of them from the *Idylls* but a number from his earlier Arthurian
poems, which had not hitherto been drawn upon: "The Morte d'Arthur"
and "Sir Galahad," both first published in 1842. Among these paintings
were Arthur Hughes's *The Knight of the Sun* (1860), and Watts's *Sir Galahad
(or Sir Galahael, as it was first called), of which he painted two versions in
a single year (1862).*

The harvest of subjects from the first *Idylls* took two forms. One consist­
et of portraits of Enid and Elaine, the two "sympathetic" heroines among
the four from whom the poems took their names. More precisely, it
consisted of attaching the names to the usual female heads or figures, with
no apparent effort to adhere to Tennyson's intent. "They are a good deal
alike, and all tawdry," said a reviewer confronted by all four heroines
painted by one artist, at the Society of British Artists show in 1862.\(^{18}\) The
remaining fast-multiplying pictures from the first *Idylls* were scenes from
Elaine, either showing the ill-fated maiden tracing Sir Lancelot's history
on the shield—there were competing versions in 1861, one at the Royal
Academy, the other at the National Exhibition in Portland Place—or
following her down the river to Camelot.\(^{19}\) Repetition begot reppletion,
but still they came, down to the end of the century. No doubt there were
more portrayals of Elaine going down the river than are evident in the
record, because a number of pictures simply bearing her name may, in

*Watts, however, later asserted that at the
time he painted the picture he had not
read Tennyson's poem. When it was re­
shown at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1882,
he "stated that he would like his picture to
be illustrated by a rather different knight,
Chaucer's young Squire from the prologue
to the *Canterbury Tales*" (Maas, *Victorian
Painters*, p. 29). But there is no question
that the painting was exhibited as "Sir
Galahad."
Sir John Gilbert, *Sir Launcelot du Lake* (RA 1887) (Guildhall Art Gallery, London). Like Burne-Jones's *Cophetua*, this representation of a subject the Victorians commonly associated with Tennyson was actually derived from a Percy ballad. "Such a picture," said the *Athenaeum* (21 May), "is an anachronism. . . . The picture would serve for Sir John's idea of Don Quixote quite as well as of Sir Lancelot."

Arthur Hughes, *Galahad: The Quest of the Holy Grail* (RA 1870) (Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool). This picture was exhibited five months after the publication of Tennyson's "The Holy Grail" (one of the *Idylls of the King*) late in 1869. The trio of censer-swinging angels, however, relates it to the poet's earlier "Sir Galahad" (1842).
whose popularity was achieved in the 1860s, continued to dominate the selection. To those from Elaine were added Lancelot and Guinevere in their more chaste moments (the less chaste were taboo), Arthur dreaming in Avalon, Sir Galahad questing for the Holy Grail, and Tristram and Iseult, though toward the end of the century this last subject was no longer the virtual monopoly of Malory and Tennyson. A few Tristram and Iseult pictures were derived from Matthew Arnold and William Morris instead.

The most compelling reason why Idylls of the King was so popular with painters was Tennyson's successful “Victorianizing” of the Morte Darthur. Bringing Malory's characters and incidents into harmony with contemporary taste and morality, he transformed them into perfect subjects for drawing-room paintings, relieved of all the rude, barbarous strength they had in their original medieval literary setting. At the same time, the Arthurian materials gave Tennyson unlimited opportunity to do what he did best. The very suggestion of the word idyll, from the diminutive of the Greek word for “form,” was pictorial, and pictorialism was Tennyson's forte, just as it had been Spenser's, Thomson's, and Keats's. On his verbal canvases, an array of colorfully costumed and suitably accoutered knights and ladies, described in careful Pre-Raphaelite detail, moved against backgrounds of equally colorful and detailed landscapes and interiors. From their inception, the Idylls of the King demanded to be illustrated in paint, in all their heroism, pathos, idealism, and picturesqueness.

It was unfortunate that a term which critics repeatedly used to describe Tennyson's pictorial effects was “cabinet pictures,” because this encouraged artists to regard the Idylls exclusively as a series of detached vignettes. (No matter that occasionally these swelled to heroic size, as did Edwin Abbey's The Quest of the Holy Grail series of five paintings [1895], each of which was designed to hang twelve or fourteen feet from the ground.) Like contemporary reviews of the poems, they did scant justice to the subtlety and complexity of Tennyson's intention. Concentrating as they did on individual characters at specific moments, the vignettes, de-
tached from the broad tapestry, were unrelated to the grand scheme of the poem as an elaborately conceived and executed moral allegory. Critics and artists alike read the *Idylls* with oversimplifying eyes, treating characters and isolated tableaux and episodes as moral examples without regard for their function in the total design, an unavoidable reductiveness found also in art taken from another elaborate allegory, *The Faerie Queene*. Painters, in brief, were content to portray the surface flavor of what, in a famous phrase, Carlyle described to Emerson as superlative lollipops. They spared their contemporaries the terrible truths so artfully concealed in the *Idylls*, truths that only recent criticism has fully recognized. Seldom does any intimation of such evil appear in the paintings from *Idylls of the King*. Probably the one major Arthurian picture that forthrightly conveys such an impression is Burne-Jones's *The Beguiling of Merlin* (pl. 88). But, significantly, its connection with either Tennyson or Malory is negligible, despite its Arthurian subject; it was based instead on a French medieval romance, translated in a volume of the *Early English Text Society*.

Given the sheer length of the *Idylls* and the number of paintings derived from them, it is remarkable how narrow was the range of subjects from which artists drew. Tennyson was highly selective to begin with, in his own quarrying of Malory, but the painters were even more so. Within the twelve narrative books, there were hundreds of potential vignettes, but the number they actually chose did not exceed a dozen or two.

So with Tennyson's poems at large. Although some fifty were represented in the galleries at one time or another, many of the poems that one would think would have been painted over and over were never, in fact, painted more than once or twice. The voluptuous classicism of "The Lotus Eaters" seems to have inspired only a handful of paintings. Neither the period flavor of *The Princess*, with its outdoor scenes from contemporary life, nor its intercalated lyrics such as "Tears, idle tears" and "Now sleeps the crimson petal, now the white," found their way into more than two or three paintings. The early "Palace of Art," itself a poetized saunter through an art gallery, was the subject of a single painting, more than sixty years after the poem appeared. There seems to be no record of any painting of "Ulysses" or "Tithonus" (both in the 1842 collection from which artists drew so many other poems) despite the profound philosophical statement each contains.

Notwithstanding such inexplicable omissions, Tennyson's poetry served Victorian painters well if not always wisely. Too often it supplied fresh impetus to the boudoir school of contemporary art: typically, "O swallow, flying from the golden woods" inspired Millais to paint what was described as "a modern idyl [showing] a young lady in a blue bodice, leaning her elbow upon a chair, standing at a window, and looking at a swallow which is without." But such a cliché subject could be forgiven even an artist as admired as Millais had by then (1865) become; as the *Examiner* remarked, "though it is a thought better to be expressed in verse than in a richly-coloured picture . . . it is . . . English work upon an English theme."

It is natural to think of Tennyson's poems as a long series of Victorian paintings, and one wonders to what extent his poetic imagination operated in terms of pictures already seen. He sometimes appears to have read popular taste through the mirror of the annual exhibitions and the engravings of the pictures shown there. Leigh Hunt suggested as much, as
early as 1842. Tennyson’s heroines, he wrote, “remind us too much of the fine young ladies in souvenirs and beauty-books, with rapturous eyes, dark locks and tresses, and all that. . . .” It is perhaps not unfair to imagine a reciprocal arrangement between Tennyson and contemporary painters, whereby each party supplied the other with ready-made subjects. If innumerable female portraits and genre scenes were casually (but shrewdly) associated with Tennyson when they were exhibited, it is likely that many of the poems from which they were derived could have been traced in turn to female portraits and genre scenes already painted—the common coin of artistic production, widely familiar through both cabinet pictures and engravings.

THE BROWNINGS

Alexander Pope excepted, no English poet, of his own time or any other, had more varied connections with art than did Robert Browning. Several of his greatest dramatic monologues are concerned with the practice, theory, and ideals of the painter’s art. The dramatic monologue itself, which was his most characteristic poetic form and which he brought to perfection, may well have owed more than a little to the popularity of narrative paintings, in that they both portrayed single significant and revealing, if not necessarily crucial, moments in the lives of men and women. From childhood to old age he was a tireless gallerygoer, beginning with visits to the Dulwich Gallery across the fields from his home in Camberwell. At a time when his strongly individual genius was recognized by only a few, he replaced Scott and Byron in the admiration of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Yet, in contrast to the hundreds of paintings inspired by Tennyson, Browning was invoked by a mere handful, even after he had belatedly achieved substantial popularity and his readers, one would think, had realized how many subjects in his colorful and dramatic poetry cried out for pictorial treatment. Only a dozen or so of his poems were ever represented at exhibitions, and none by more than a few paintings apiece.

A brighter destiny might have been anticipated from the fact that despite its notorious unintelligibility, Browning’s first long poem, *Paracelsus* (1835), was the subject of two paintings within five years of its publication, one by David Scott, which he sold to the Scottish Art Union (1839), the other by the popular genre painter Richard Redgrave, exhibited at the Royal Academy the following year.

The next inclusion of a Browning poem in an exhibition of art came about under unusual circumstances. Near the end of 1841, Browning’s friend John Forster “pressed me,” he wrote in a letter, “into committing verse on the instant, not the minute” to accompany Daniel Maclise’s “divine Venetian work,” titled *A Serenade*, to the British Institution’s next show. Browning obliged “on the instant” in Forster’s rooms, without seeing the painting, and the resulting seven lines were duly printed in the catalogue:

1 send my heart up to thee, all my heart
In this my singing.
For the stars help me, and the sea bears part;
The very ... to Venice' streets to leave one space
Above me, whence thy face
May light my joyous heart to thee its dwelling-place.
And now tell me,” Browning asked, “is this below the average of Catalogue original poetry?” Forty years later, recounting the episode to F. J. Furnivall, Browning said, “When I did see it [the picture], I thought the Serenade too jolly somewhat for the notion I got from Forster—and I took up the subject in my own way” to the tune of 224 more lines, working up a self-contained and wholly original story. The poem, “In a Gondola,” was published in its entirety in Browning’s next collection of verse, *Dramatic Lyrics* (November 1842). Meanwhile, in May of that year, Browning had reversed the process by writing two poems for as yet nonexistent pictures. Willie Macready, the tragedian’s oldest son who liked to draw, was ill with a bad cough, and Browning composed “The Cardinal and the Dog” and “The Pied Piper of Hamelin” for him to illustrate. The drawings are now in the Browning Collection at Baylor University; the poems were published alongside “In a Gondola” in *Dramatic Lyrics.* “The Pied Piper” was probably illustrated more often than any other of Browning’s poems; some eight versions are recorded (pl. 85).

Rossetti’s enthusiasm for Browning was expressed chiefly in a scene from “Pippa Passes,” “Hist! said Kate the Queen.” The painting was never finished and subsequently was cut up, but the color sketch, which Rossetti had first sold to his aunt Charlotte, was acquired by his early patron, a Leeds millionaire, and eventually went to Eton College (pl. 347). Another Pre-Raphaelite, Arthur Hughes, exhibited his *The King’s Orchard* (RA 1859) with a quotation from “Pippa Passes.”

There were a few other pictures from that poem and from “Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came,” as well as one or two from such poems as “Love Among the Ruins,”* “Saul,” “Andrea del Sarto,” “Caliban upon Setebos,” and “A Toccata of Galuppi’s”; but almost none are traced, nor were they often described in the press when exhibited. A rare exception is...
Hughes's *The Guarded Bower*, from "Count Gismond" (RA 1866), now at Bristol.

The half-dozen or so pictures from poems by Elizabeth Barrett Browning had a somewhat better survival rate. Four were painted from *Aurora Leigh*, including Hughes's *The Tryst* (pl. 170), whose subject, Aurora Leigh's dismissal of Romney (one of Ruskin's correspondents), was dissatisfied with it, but both Ruskin and Rossetti encouraged her to order another from Mrs. Browning's works. Hughes's subject this time was from her *Poems Before Congress*: "That Was a Piedmontese" (pl. 348).

**BULWER-LYTTON**

In the course of their travels in search of pictorial subjects, the artists Clive Newcome and J. J. Ridley, in Thackeray's novel *The Newcomes*, visit Pompeii.

The young man [Clive] had read Sir Bulwer-Lytton's delightful story, which has become the history of Pompeii, before they came thither, and Pliny's description, *apud* the "Guide-Book." Admiring the wonderful ingenuity with which the English writer has illustrated the place by his text, as if the houses were so many pictures to which he had appended a story, Clive, the waggish, who was always indulging his vein for caricature, was proposing that they should take the same place, names, people, and make a burlesque story: "What would be a better figure," says he, "than Pliny's mother, whom the historian describes as exceedingly corpulent, and walking away from the catastrophe holding cushions behind her, to shield her plump person from the cinders! Yes, old Mrs. Pliny shall be my heroine!" says Clive. A picture of her on a dark grey paper, and touched up with red at the extremities, exists in Clive's album to the present day. (Chap. 39)

Thackeray's biographers may be left to decide just how this sideswipe at Bulwer-Lytton fits in with his inveterate dislike of the man and his overwritten but popular novels. Clive and his friend, unlike other artists of the day, clearly had no high opinion of the famous catastrophe, with which Bulwer (as he then was) had become identified following the publication of *The Last Days of Pompeii* in 1834, as a subject for painting. Or perhaps, as is suggested by Clive's selection of the corpulent Mrs. Pliny as his heroine, they merely rejected Bulwer-Lytton's romantic treatment of the Pompeii theme.

In any case, the destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum in 79 A.D. had become a well-established artistic subject long before Bulwer-Lytton used it as the setting for a romantic tale. In the late eighteenth century, the Neapolitan painter Pierre-Jacques Volaire had made a veritable career of portraying the extinction of Pompeii; his numerous illustrations of the event still are scattered in galleries throughout Europe. In 1822, John Martin displayed at the Egyptian Hall his huge *Destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum*, painted, as his "descriptive catalogue" boasted, after he had "sedulously consulted every source of information within his reach," including Mrs. Pliny's husband, Strabo, Diodorus Siculus, and the English archaeologist Sir William Gell. It is rather surprising that although they were friends, and in his *England and the English*, published the year before *The Last Days of Pompeii* appeared, he had praised Martin as "the greatest, the most lofty, the most permanent, the most original genius of his age," Bulwer did not contrive an opportunity to mention him in the novel.

348. Arthur Hughes, "That Was a Piedmontese" (1862) (Tate Gallery, London). A scene from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poem "A Court Lady" (*Poems Before Congress*, 1860): a "lady of Milan" pauses before a soldier wounded in the struggle for Italian independence. "Back he fell while she spoke. She rose to her feet with a spring— / 'That was a Piedmontese! and this is the Court of the King!'"
Edward J. Poynter, *Faithful unto Death* (RA 1865) (Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool). Like some other paintings by the Victorian classicists, Poynter's realization of a scene in Bulwer's *The Last Days of Pompeii* was widely reproduced in prints and textbooks, in this case to illustrate the ideal of stoic devotion to duty.

*Late in the Victorian era, when neo-academic artists were reviving Roman subjects to considerable acclaim, Alma-Tadema was rebuked for his suppression of this basic aspect of the Pompeii theme in a painting at the Royal Academy in 1896. Said the *Fortnightly Review* (n.s. 59: 968–69): "... A bevy of fair modern girls lie about, clad in not very archaeological costume. Girls like these, with these innocent naive faces, could not have existed in such a hot-bed of lust as Pompeii must have been. Painters who want to realise Roman women of the decadence should read Mr. Swinburne's *Faustina* first."*

Instead, it has been shown that he derived some aspects of his Pompeian setting from a then famous painting by the Russian artist Karl Bryullov, which was exhibited across the Continent in 1833–34.

The subject had entered literature with Madame de Staël's *Corinne* (1805), and it had affinities with the so-called school of catastrophe in contemporary English literature—the long, turgid poems by Henry H. Milman (*The Fall of Jerusalem*, 1820; *Belshazzar*, 1822), Edwin Atherstone (*The Last Days of Herculaneum*, 1821; *The Fall of Nineveh*, 1828–30), and James Montgomery (*The World Before the Flood* in ten cantos, 1813).

As Laurence Goldstein has shown, the subject of Pompeii had a dual symbolism: the idea of death (the end of the world, as far as the Pompeians were concerned) and—unsettling to the pious, perhaps guilt-ridden Victorians—the notion of a materialistic, high-living society that virtually begged to be destroyed by an angry God, the Roman equivalent of Sodom, Gomorrah, and Babylon.

Thus the destruction of Pompeii had acquired a number of strong literary and artistic resonances by the time that Bulwer “humanized” the catastrophe by introducing a romantic plot in the midst of the Vesuvian ash and lava storm: the story of the young lovers Glaucus and Ione and the sacrifice of the blind slave girl Nydia, who, though hopelessly in love with Glaucus, leads the couple to safety and then commits suicide. The first Pompeii painting to be shown at the Royal Academy after the appearance of the novel was Joseph Severn's *The Witches' Cavern: Glaucus and Ione* (1840). In the next sixty years, during which the novel continued to be reprinted and read as a modern classic, well over thirty-five Pompeii paintings are recorded. (A few were exhibited without reference to Bulwer-Lytton, but every literate art lover could be relied upon to make the connection.) Of these, the best-known was Edward Poynter's *Faithful Unto Death* (pl. 349), suggested by the heroic sentry in the novel who was commemorated in a popular recitation piece by one Joseph Malins:

What of the faithful sentinel?  
Undaunted still is he! 
There, lava pours, 'midst thunderous roars, 
Into the boiling sea: 
Here, clouds of burning ashes fall, 
And all in terror flee—
Save one, whose grave doth round him rise; 
He stands unmoved; and standing—dies!

A rival picture at the 1865 Royal Academy was Paul Falconer Poole's *A Suburb of the Roman City of Pompeii, During the Eruption of 79 A.D.* Five years earlier, Poole had exhibited another scene from the novel, which the *Blackwood's* critic described in all too suitable language:

The boat is speeding its swift escape from the devastated city, Glaucus and Ione recline in the soft dalliance of gentlest love, and the blind girl Nydia awakes her harp to music. A dream-like spell has softened all to harmony. It is a scene of poetic longing, or of languour, as of passion spent. The moon dances in silver footfalls upon the midnight sea; the harp-strings sound as the ripples play in the boat's gentle wake, while the soft joy of sadness floats the exiles from their ruined homes.

But, the *Literary Gazette* had asked.

What will Sir E. Bulwer-Lytton say . . . ? Just this. “They are none of mine.” Did a more love-sea-sickened pair ever seek a flight o'er the ocean than these two lovers? They are painfully sentimental in their woe, and gentle Luna is
contributing everything that is bilious to their retching countenances. Mr. Poole is perfectly at home in plague-stricken horrors, and he then depicts with painful reality physiognomical suffering: but Glauces and his lady-love were never intended to be sick, at least at sea, and even if they were, it was not the period for the artist to paint them.8

It seems likely that Poole, responding to this astringent criticism, omitted from the 1865 painting any narrative element, whether of seasick lovers or any other individual characters. His reviewers on this occasion compared the picture with his celebrated _Solomon Eagle Exhorting the People to Repentance_ (pl. 286) during the indigenous English catastrophe of the plague, and said nothing about a story line.

If Bulwer-Lytton failed to mention Martin’s painting in his novel, Martin in turn seems not to have alluded to the novel in his art. Instead, he drew upon Bulwer-Lytton’s poem _King Arthur_ (1848) for his painting of _Arthur and Aegle in the Happy Valley_ (pl. 350), shown at the Royal Academy the next year. The poem, an ill-advised attempt to write the Arthurian epic Milton had once envisaged but failed to achieve, improbably brought the captive Arthur to a Shangri-La paradise founded by the Etruscans, where he falls in love with the queen. But, as the painting shows, the craggy Happy Valley is not exempt from time and catastrophe, and the lovers are brought face to face with mortality in the midst of one more depressingly sublime Martinesque landscape.

A total of about seventy-five paintings from Bulwer-Lytton is recorded. A dozen works in addition to _The Last Days of Pompeii_ were represented, from _Eugene Aram_ in 1832 (two sketches from this novel about a school-master-murderer were shown at the Royal Academy within months of its appearance) to _What Will He Do With It?_ in 1858. _Eugene Aram_ was pictured some eight or ten times in all, the latest in 1876. One other subject from Bulwer-Lytton has a prominent place in the history of Victorian art. Although the story of Rienzi, “the last of the Romans” (a fourteenth-century Italian patriot), had previously been told by Mary Russell Mitford in her tragedy of 1828 (from which at least one painting, shown in 1831, was derived), it was his novel of 1835 that inspired Holman Hunt’s _Rienzi Vowing to Obtain Justice for the Death of His Young Brother_ (RA 1849).

350. John Martin, _Arthur and Aegle in the Happy Valley_ (RA 1849) (Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne). Bulwer-Lytton’s attempt at epic provided Martin with a contemporary source from which to derive one more portrayal of catastrophe and desolation.
The unprecedented popularity of Dickens's novels, particularly in the first half (1836–55) of his career, gave artists a large choice of subjects in the very years when anecdotal and narrative subjects were at the peak of their own popularity. Few members of the art-loving public were unacquainted with the scores of inimitable characters thus far introduced into the Dickens gallery or with the prodigal array of scenes fit for illustration. In 1855, one of Dickens's most perceptive contemporary critics, David Masson, praised his versatility as a painter of verbal backgrounds—rural scenes, sea pieces, cityscapes, the interiors of huts, drawing rooms, cathedrals—and as a Dutch-like delineator of details of dress and furniture.

Take him, again, in the figure department (continued Masson). Here he can be an animal-painter with Landseer when he likes, as witness his dogs, ponies, and ravens; he can be a historical painter, as witness his description of the Gordon riots; he can be a portrait-painter or a caricaturist like Leech; he can give you a bit of village or country life, like Wilkie; he can paint a haggard or squalid scene of low city-life, so as to remind one of some of the Dutch artists, Rembrandt included, or a pleasant family-scene, gay or sentimental, reminding one of Maclise or Frank Stone; he can body forth romantic conceptions of terror or beauty, that have risen in his own imagination; he can compose a fantastic fairy piece; he can even succeed in a powerful dream or allegory, where the figures are hardly human.1

But though Dickens may have been, even more than Scott, the Victorian artist's novelist just as Spenser was "the painter's poet," his novels placed prospective illustrators at a disadvantage unique in the history of English literature, because, at their first appearance in weekly or monthly numbers, most came equipped with a set of engraved illustrations.2 Thus an iconographic tradition was instantaneously established, the more solidly because the illustrations accompanied the text to every reader. These engravings, by talented and experienced artists like Hablot K. Browne ("Phiz") and George Cruikshank, who prepared them in close collaboration with Dickens himself, must have offered a certain amount of initial discouragement to artists ambitious to cash in on the lasting rage for Boz's fiction. Still, no set of illustrations, however skillful and however obedient to the author's intention, could be regarded as definitive; and, as with all literary works, there was still room for independent interpretation. Furthermore, unlike the initial illustrators, painters had the inestimable advantage of color at their disposal, so much more vivid and lifelike than the black-and-white designs to which the book engravings were confined.

The incidence of paintings from Dickens, as with those from Scott (there were some two hundred altogether), varied greatly from novel to novel and did not necessarily coincide with the novel's popularity. *Pickwick Papers* was seldom drawn from. Two versions of "The goblin that stole the sexton, Gabriel Grub"—from one of the interpolated tales, not from the Pickwick plot itself—were offered many years after Dickens's first novel appeared (1853, 1872); none seems to have been produced during the initial *Pickwick* craze (1836–37). This was in marked contrast to what happened when Dickens's next novels appeared. There was then no such lag between a novel's publication and the first paintings from it as occurred when the early Waverley novels appeared in their regular, stately sequence. Artists, indeed, were hardly less behindhand in exploiting Dickens's popularity than were the numerous playwrights who patched
together stage adaptations of his current novel while it was still being written. The first painting from *Oliver Twist*, a picture of Rose Maylie by one Mrs. Battersby, was hung at the Royal Academy only two months after the serialization of the novel was completed in March 1839, although, to be sure, the whole book had been available in three volumes in the preceding October. From that time to the end of the century, some ten paintings from *Oliver Twist* are recorded, ranging from a mere topographical sketch “on the spot of Jacob’s Island, Southwark, mentioned by Boz in *Oliver Twist*” exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1843, to the late *Oliver Twist: “He Walks to London”* (RA 1890).

Sir William Allan was the first to paint from *Nicholas Nickleby*. His *The Orphan and the Bird* was seen at the Royal Academy in 1840, six months after the serialization ended. There were half a dozen paintings from the novel in the next decade, and at least as many scattered across the forty years after that. The popular anecdotal painter Thomas Webster, who did not often draw from literary sources, painted two pictures from *Nicholas Nickleby*. One, seen at the Royal Academy in 1848, was titled *The Internal Economy of Dotheboys Hall* and portrayed Mrs. Squeers forcing brimstone and treacle, the well-known preventive panacea, down the throats of some thirty gagging pupil-victims. “The dame,” remarked the *Literary Gazette*, “possesses all of her revolting attributes, and every child tells a tale of different distress and misery; fear, loathing, suffering fill the assembly, and yet there is not a trait to wound the feelings of the spectator” (emphasis added).3 Webster’s other (undated) picture, *The Interview Between Ralph Nickleby and His Niece Kate*, was sold at auction in 1867. Better known today is Edgar Bundy’s riotous *Dotheboys Hall Breaks Up Forever*, which hangs in Dickens House, London.

Next came *The Old Curiosity Shop*, by a substantial margin the most popular of Dickens’s novels as far as the art world was concerned. Of the approximately two hundred Dickens paintings recorded, more than forty
William Holman Hunt, Little Nell and Her Grandfather (British Institution 1846) (Sheffield City Art Galleries). “There was a pool of clear water in the field, in which the child laved her hands and face, and cooled her feet before setting forth to walk again. She would have the old man refresh himself in this way too, and making him sit down upon the grass, cast the water on him with her hands, and dried it with her simple dress” (The Old Curiosity Shop, chap. 15). Student work, painted when Hunt was nineteen years old. A number of other artists, including William Quiller Orchardson, treated this subject.

Robert B. Martineau, Kit’s Writing Lesson (RA 1852) (Tate Gallery, London). One of the best known paintings from Dickens, and a prime example of Victorian illustrations of the praiseworthy thirst for education, particularly in the lower ranks of society. Martineau captures the essence of the scene at the end of the third chapter of The Old Curiosity Shop: “He [Kit Nubbles] tucked up his sleeves and squared his elbows and put his face close to the copy-book and squinted horribly at the lines... From the first moment of having the pen in his hand, he began to wallow in blots, and to daub himself with ink up to the very roots of his hair... If he did by accident form a letter properly, he immediately smeared it out again with his arm in his preparations to make another”—all in the interests of Little Nell’s “gentle wish to teach” and Kit’s “anxious desire to learn.”

Barnaby Rudge, today one of Dickens’s least-read novels, which followed The Old Curiosity Shop, was second only to that novel in the number of paintings it inspired—some twenty-five altogether. Its appearance was a crucial event in the life of Frith, who was just beginning his long career as an illustrator of English literary subjects. He recalled many years later:

My inclination being strongly towards the illustration of modern life, I had read the works of Dickens in the hope of finding material for the exercise of any talent I might possess; but at that time the ugliness of modern dress frightened me, and it was not till the publication of “Barnaby Rudge,” and the delightful Dolly Varden was presented to us, that I felt my opportunity had come, with the cherry-coloured mantle and the hat and pink ribbons.

In 1842, a few months after the serialization of Barnaby Rudge was completed, Frith exhibited at the Society of British Artists a Dolly Varden portrait that was leagues removed from the insipidity of the keepsake school. Dickens saw it and wished to buy it, but the collector Joseph Gillott had already put in his claim, so Dickens commissioned another version, along with a scene from Nicholas Nickleby showing Kate Nickleby sewing a ball dress as her thoughts wander elsewhere. The two paintings remained in Dickens’s possession throughout his life, and were sold after his death for the large sum of £1,360. Frith painted several more Dolly Varden pictures, showing the coquettish young woman in different attitudes and
with significant alterations of dress and accessories (pl. 354). The original painting came to be known among artists as “the Dolly with the bracelet.” The version Dickens acquired showed her looking flirtatiously back over her shoulder at Joe Willett as they pass in the woods. Still others had her delivering a letter from Edward Chester to Miss Haredale, and declaring, when taxed with a fondness for Joe Willett, that “she hoped she could do better than that, indeed!” The success of these Dolly Varden pictures was promptly exploited. For fifteen years, from 1844 to 1860, Dolly Varden was Little Nell’s constant rival in the annual exhibitions.*

Rather surprisingly, few painters derived subjects from Dickens’s immensely popular Christmas books of the 1840s. There is evidently no record of a single painting from A Christmas Carol and only four or five, distributed at long intervals, from The Chimes and The Cricket on the Hearth. From the latter story was drawn a triad of theatrical portraits (RA 1846) showing Mr. and Mrs. Keeley and their daughter in one of the stage versions.

Martin Chuzzlewit stirred little enthusiasm among artists; two of the three recorded paintings date from much later (1860, 1875), and both depicted Sairey Gamp and Betsy Prig. By contrast, Dombey and Son evoked the speediest response of any of Dickens’s novels. When the Royal Academy exhibition of 1847 opened, the serialization was less than half completed; the May number was the eighth of twenty-one. Yet no fewer than three Dombey paintings were shown: one of the death of little Paul Dombey, which had occurred in the February number, one of Walter Gay on board the Son and Heir, from the March number, and one of Captain Cuttle and Uncle Sol tracing the ship’s course on their charts, from the very last page of that number. These were the first of some twenty paintings from the novel, most of which were concerned with the two sentimental foci, of Paul and his death as he kept wondering what the wild waves were saying, and of his—in effect—orphanned sister. The rest were genre scenes, presumably as full of quaint accessories as the Old Curiosity Shop, which depicted the snug interior of the Jolly Midshipman shop with its chaotic array of nautical equipment.

Dombey and Son was the last Dickens novel to appeal to many artists. Even David Copperfield, with its many possibilities for genre and sentimental work, inspired only half a dozen paintings. Bleak House, which repelled many readers because of its grim London scenes and its satiric assaults on such revered institutions as the law, religion, and philanthropy, accounted for scarcely more, among them—the first, 1853—a female portrait that an opportunistic artist named Rosa, for Lady Dedlock’s maid. Much later, three artists ventured to depict the pathetic figure of Jo, the doomed crossing sweeper. One of these pictures (RA 1886) was of the actress Jenny Lee in the role of Jo in a dramatization of the novel.

There seem to have been no paintings from Hard Times, a novel set in a sooty manufacturing town that in general could not have supplied many subjects agreeable to current taste, although something could have been made out of Louisa Gradgrind’s sad story and, in a different vein, Sleary’s circus. Little Dorrit was represented by few pictures other than the two small oils that Frith painted to be engraved for the Library Edition of Dickens’s works. Despite its chiaroscuro of melodrama and romance, A Tale of Two Cities attracted few painters apart from Henry Wallis, whose The Devotion of Sidney Carton was shown at the Royal Academy in 1876.
William Maw Egley, *Florence Dombey in Captain Cuttle's Parlour* (ca. 1850) (Victoria & Albert Museum, Crown Copyright). The scene is either Captain Cuttle's lodgings near the India Docks (chap. 23) or his temporary quarters at the Wooden Midshipman (chaps. 48, 49). Only readers of the novel as well as of the painting would have realized the significance of certain details: the painting or engraving of a shipwreck (perhaps by Dickens's friend Clarkson Stanfield?), the ship model with its rigging awry, and the half-concealed map of the Cape of Good Hope—all referring to the feared fate of Walter Gay, Florence's unacknowledged lover. A painting and a ship model appear in "Phiz's" illustrations of both locales.

Associated with *Great Expectations* was a single painting, of Pip, Joe Gargery, and the convicts crossing the marsh early in the novel. From *Our Mutual Friend* came only half a dozen pictures, including two of Jenny Wren, the crippled doll's dressmaker; one of these (RA 1882) was by Kate Perugini.

In April 1870, the first number of Dickens's new novel *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* appeared. On the last day of the month, Dickens attended the banquet of the Royal Academy preceding the opening of the annual exhibition, on whose walls hung two of Luke Fildes's illustrations for *Edwin Drood*. In the presence of the Prince of Wales, Gladstone, and Disraeli, Dickens responded to the toast to literature:

> The literary visitors of the Royal Academy [of whom he was one] tonight desire to congratulate their hosts on a very interesting exhibition, in which risen excellence supremely asserts itself, and from which promise of a brilliant succession in time to come is not wanting. They naturally see with especial interest the writings and persons of great men—historians, philosophers, poets, and novelists—vividly illustrated around them here. And they hope they may modestly claim to have rendered some little assistance towards the production of many of the pictures in this magnificent gallery.  

Dickens concluded by paying tribute to one of his longtime artist friends who had died three days earlier—Daniel Maclise, the illustrator of Shakespeare, Moore, Goldsmith, Milton, Bulwer-Lytton, Byron, Scott, Jonson, and Keats. This, as it turned out, was Dickens's last public appearance. Six weeks later, on 8 June, he had a stroke at his beloved country villa on the Rochester Road. By an ironic coincidence, the artist who of all Victorian painters loved literature most, James Smetham, was returning the next day from a holiday in Surrey. In a letter to his brother he wrote,

> At Rochester we learned from the verger of the Cathedral that Charles Dickens had been seized at dinner with a fit on Wednesday evening. On our way we had to pass his house at Gad's Hill—stopped opposite to it for a moment, and saw two physicians evidently in consultation at the bay window. This was at 4.30, and at that moment he was dying. He expired at 6 or soon after. It was affecting to see, for the first time, his country house under these circumstances. A few weeks ago I passed him as he walked in a weary sort of way, and wrapped in his own thoughts, from the Royal Academy Exhibition and down Piccadilly.  

THACKERAY

When he became a famous novelist, Thackeray, in contrast to Dickens, was seldom represented on the walls of the exhibitions he had once attended as a professional critic. Only one or two paintings are recorded from each of several novels, including *Vanity Fair*, *Pendennis*, and *The Virginians*, and half a dozen from *The Newcomes*, including at least two (1878 and 1886) of Colonel Newcome among the poor brethren in the Charterhouse. From *The History of Henry Esmond*, however, came ten or twelve pictures, the first at the Royal Academy the year following its publication in 1852. Of these, the most discussed was Augustus Egg's *Beatrice Knighting Henry Esmond* (pl. 356). Beatrice and Lady Castlewood were the favorite figures of the artists who chose *Esmond* subjects (see pl. 169). As late as 1898, visitors to the Royal Scottish Academy exhibition saw a canvas which depicted one of those scenes in literary history that should have happened even though they did not: Henry Esmond describing the Battle of Blenheim to Addison and Steele.

*Among the literature-related paintings hung that year were subjects from Tennyson, Sheridan, Shakespeare, Bulwer-Lytton, Burns, the Spectator, Scott, Fielding, Keats, Milton, Hood, Byron, Richardson, Bunyan, and Thackeray.*
Writing in the *Home and Foreign Review* in 1863, a perceptive critic said of George Eliot, “We are persuaded that the study of pictures has helped her as much as the study of living models. We should not be surprised if the famous scene at the Rainbow in *Silas Marner*—a scene compared by competent critics to Shakespeare’s scenes at the Boar’s Head—turned out to be one the like of which she has never witnessed except on the canvas of Teniers, seen through an atmosphere of Dickens, or of her own deep knowledge of rustic life.” Recent scholarship has confirmed the writer’s guess. Time after time in her novels, George Eliot applied her remembrance of paintings she had seen during her many visits with George Henry Lewes to art galleries in Britain and on the Continent. She regarded herself as a genre painter in words, and although critics during her lifetime alluded less often than might have been expected to the resemblances between her art and that of the Dutch school she so much admired, it is clear that one of the reasons for the popularity of *Adam Bede*, *The Mill on the Floss*, *Silas Marner*, *Felix Holt*, and to a somewhat lesser degree *Middlemarch* was the way Eliot imported into fiction the subjects and techniques of rural genre painting. They were praised in the same...
terms in which such pictures by contemporary artists were praised, for their sympathetic portrayal of the scenes and characters of country life. Apart from Scott a generation earlier (and possibly Dickens, who, however, used mostly urban material), she was the nineteenth-century novelist who brought literature into closest alliance with the tastes and topics of popular genre. In some respects, also, Eliot's fiction had an affinity with Goldsmith's; she mined the same vein that so many Victorian artists exploited in their scenes from *The Vicar of Wakefield*. One might say that the innumerable paintings from Goldsmith, along with all the similar subjects from nonliterary sources, helped sustain the taste for humble rural life in art until Eliot was ready to benefit from it.

*Adam Bede* was represented by a dozen or so paintings between 1861 and 1890, most of them being pictures of Hetty Sorrel, a latter-day Keepsake beauty discovered at the butter churn. Two of Edward Corbould's watercolors from the novel are in the royal collection: *Dinah Morris Preaching on Hayslope Green* and *Hetty and Captain Donnithorne in Mrs. Poyser's Dairy*, both painted in 1861.

The other novels from English life were seldom drawn upon, the only picture by a notable artist being Millais's *The Girhood of St. Teresa* (RA 1893). A costume piece, it was suggested by "the lines in [the Prelude to] Middlemarch showing how the little girl walked forth one morning with her smaller brother, intent on seeking martyrdom in the country of the Moors. . . . The child here," said Millais's first cataloguer, "is clearly afflicted with religious mania, while her brother is indifferent to everything but the merits of his orange." 

*Romola* fared somewhat better. Frederic Leighton made thirty-eight drawings on wood for the first edition, and, possibly as a result of this impetus, between 1877 and 1892 nine paintings are recorded from the novel, two by another Leighton—Edmund Blair—*The Dying Copernicus* (RA 1880) and another simply titled *Romola* (RA 1887).

**THE PRE-RAPHAELITES: ROSSETTI, MORRIS, SWINBURNE**

The special link between poetry and painting represented by the Pre-Raphaelite group's work in both arts could be seen sometimes in the subjects taken from one man's poetry by other painters. But although Rossetti most conspicuously merged the sister arts, few of his poems were chosen, mainly because he was his own best illustrator. It is likely, too, that his notoriety as the fomenter of the anti-Academic movement disqualified his poems as prospective sources for establishment painters to draw from. After 1871, in addition, his reputation as artist suffered indirectly from Robert Buchanan's attack on him, in the October number of the *Contemporary Review*, as the leader of "the fleshy school of poetry," far gone in libidinous abandon. In 1880, a review in the *Times* of a routine painting, *Thistledown Gatherer*, which quoted lines from Rossetti—"Gleaned by a girl in autumn of her youth, / Which one new year makes soft her marriage-bed,"—commented that Rossetti's poetry was "about as undesirable a source for inspiration as a young painter could resort to." Such pictures as were derived from his poetry came from the easels of his associates and sympathizers. Burne-Jones began a diptych of "The Blessed Damozel" in 1857 (and completed a watercolor of one half of the heaven/earth design); and Charles Fairfax Murray, Rossetti's studio assistant in the 1870s, painted a scene dimly inspired by "Love's Nocturn."
The Honorable John Collier showed Lilith at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1887, Gerald Moira painted Willowwood (from The House of Life) for the Academy show of 1894, and in the same years (1893–97) Byam Shaw displayed a series of pictures likewise titled from the poems: Rose Mary, Silent Noon, The Blessed Damozel, and Love's Baubles.

William Morris fared better with artists, largely because the long narrative poems that comprised his Earthly Paradise fitted in so well with the interests of the new classical school of Leighton, Poynter, and Alma-Tadema. Half a dozen paintings from The Earthly Paradise, most of them from the Psyche-Venus story, appeared at the Royal Academy and the Grosvenor Gallery between 1879 and 1894, including Spencer Stanhope's Charon and Psyche (1883). Poynter's Atalanta's Race, also known as The Suppliant to Venus (RA 1871), bore a quotation from Morris. Many of Burne-Jones's pictures came from the same source; the most ambitious was his series of eight paintings (four completed, the rest surviving as cartoons) of the Perseus myth, commissioned by Arthur Balfour for his house in Carlton Gardens and painted over a span of seventeen years. Alma-Tadema took the title of his Royal Academy painting of 1891 from one Pre-Raphaelite poet and the motto from another: An Earthly Paradise, with a quotation from Swinburne. A handful of other pictures were exhibited with Swinburnian quotations, including Walter Crane's Freedom (Grosvenor Gallery 1885), but few if any actual subjects were taken from the poetry of the Victorian enfant terrible. He, too, located some of his most characteristic early poems in classic antiquity ("Faustine," "Hymn to Proserpine," "The Garden of Proserpine"). But in view of their "paganism", a convenient blur-word for blasphemy and deviant sexuality, it is easy to understand why the academic painters avoided them; the public demanded myths in which ancient Greeks and Romans, though their ladies were given to languishing in nude luxury in or alongside marble baths, were still somehow as respectable as themselves.