THE BOYDELL SHAKESPEARE GALLERY:
THE AMERICAN ARTISTS, THE AMERICAN EDITION

John Boydell, engraver and entrepreneur, opened his Shakespeare Gallery at 52 Pall Mall, London, in 1789. The event was commemorated in Francis Wheatley's watercolor, The Opening of the Shakespeare Gallery (1790). Before the exhibition closed sixteen years later, in 1805, it had grown to include 167 paintings by 34 of the best known artists of the period. Boydell also commissioned 45 engravers to prepare prints, one hundred in folio format, another hundred in quarto format. It was therefore possible to purchase an engraved print of any painting on display. The Gallery itself, in a period of revolution, made a bold nationalistic statement, not simply in giving tribute to the great Bard of the nation, but also in Boydell's announced endeavor to promote "an English School of History Painting" (Boydell 1789, iii). Visitors to the Gallery participated in that nationalistic purpose, and, in purchasing prints to display in their homes, supported the new mass production of art.

Throughout the 1790s, the Shakespeare Gallery was one of the most successful attractions in London, and rival enterprises soon appeared: Thomas Macklin's "Poets' Gallery," Henry Fuseli's "Milton Gallery," Robert Bowyer's "History of England," Robert John Thornton's "Temple of Flora" (Altick 1978, 108-109; Altick 1985, 37-55). Boydell's shrewd scheme to exhibit paintings and sell prints began to flounder as competitors jostled for a share of the market. War with revolutionary France restricted an anticipated market on the continent. Boydell's sales dropped off. The leather-bound set of 100 large copper-plate engravings (crown folio), A Collection of Prints, from Pictures for the Purpose of illustrating the Dramatic Works of Shakespeare, by the Artists of Great Britain (London 1803 [1805]) was intended as supplement to The Dramatic Works of Shakespeare, edited by George Steevens in 9 volumes (London, 1791-1802), which already included 103 smaller copper-plate engravings (quarto). Having paid over £100,000 in commissions to artists and engravers and in expenses for the exhibition hall itself, Boydell found himself at the brink of bankruptcy and was forced to hold a lottery for the entire collection of paintings to meet his debts.

On December 10, 1804, the last of the lottery tickets was sold; on that very day John Boydell died. His nephew, Josiah Boydell (1752-1817), an artist and engraver who had become his uncle's business partner, was able to pay off debts and continue his uncle's engraving and printing business with the earnings from the lottery. The Shakespeare Gallery was dismantled, paintings were dispersed, but Josiah Boydell still had the copper-plate engravings. He assumed management of the publishing house, and he saw that the published volumes with the Shakespeare illustrations were completed and distributed to subscribers. Soon after his election as Master of the Stationers' Company in 1811, he retired from business, and the engraved plates were placed in storage.

Here, were I telling an English tale, the story might end. But this is an American tale, a tale about three Americans who went to England: in 1763, Benjamin West from Philadelphia; in 1781, Mather Brown from Boston; in 1842, Shearjashub Spooner from New York. The first two were artists; the third an art historian, who found the plates in London, brought them back to the U.S., had them restored, then printed the...
two-volume American edition of 1852. Appearing 47 years after Boydell's edition, Spooner's edition was the last to be made from the original plates.

As a closing chapter to this American tale, I will return to Spooner's edition for a closer look, but the tale properly begins with Benjamin West's first financial venture with John Boydell. A milestone in art history, that partnership was the first great money-making success in the commercialization of art. Concerns were expressed by traditional artists and critics when mass-production and the commercial manufacturing of art first emerged in the latter 18th century (Eaves 1994, 33-96). Benjamin West, however, was one who embraced the new patron. For centuries the sole patrons of the arts had been the clergy and the aristocracy, each imposing their respective demands on what was to be represented and how it was to be represented. Art existed inside of churches and palaces. The engraving trade began to flourish with the rising mercantile class, the new literacy, and the burgeoning demand for books. The market for illustrated books may have been the impetus, but engravers also made available reproductions of works of art otherwise inaccessible to the population at large.

Even before the opening of the exhibition, on 29 April 1771, at the Royal Academy in Pall Mall, West's The Death of General Wolfe, had already stirred controversy. West had dared a major departure from neo-classical convention. He had depicted a recent historical event, the Siege of Quebec (13 September 1759), and he had portrayed the figures in actual military uniform rather than in Greek or Roman costume.

The subject I have to represent is the conquest of a great province of America by British troops. It is a topic that history will proudly record, and the same truth that guides the pen of the historian, should govern the pencil of the artist. I consider myself as undertaking to tell this great event to the eye of the world; but if, instead of the facts of the transaction, I represent classical fictions, how shall I be understood by posterity! I want to mark the date, the place, and the parties engaged in the event; and if I am not able to dispose of the circumstances in a picturesque manner, no academical distribution of Greek or Roman costume will enable me to do justice to the subject. (Galt 1816-1820, vol. II, 48-49)

The furor, as it commenced, was simply over the departure from neo-classical convention. "The lovers of old art, or of the compositions called classical," as Spooner repeated, "complained of the barbarism of boots, buttons, and blunderbusses, and cried out for naked warriors, with bows, bucklers, and battering rams" (Spooner 1880, 46; original emphasis).

The debate had by no means subsided when, four years later, a new set of objections began to rage: West had not only departed from neo-classical standards, he had turned to the popular market. In accordance with his agreement with John Boydell, William Woollet was commissioned to engrave The Death of General Wolfe. Line engraving, with its dot-and-lozenge technique of sculpturing the illusions of three-dimensionality and the action of light and shadow, is a labor-intensive task. Woollet devoted five years to his engraving. Boydell commenced printing in 1775. Its stunning success demonstrated that the market place was a powerful patron. The art world would never be the same. Woollet made £7,000 on that one print; and Boydell made £15,000 in selling it. At this period, West calculated, one could live the "genteel life" in London for £500 a year (Alberts 1978, 114). For his five years' labor, Woollet had

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1 Spooner borrows his account from Cunningham (1830-1839) and Galt (1816-1820); see also Dunlap ([1834] 1969, vol. I, 64); "Benjamin West" in Spooner (1873, vol. II, 1082-1090).
The partnership with Boydell continued: West's *William Penn's Treaty with the Indians* (1771; exhibited 1772), engraved by John Hall, went on sale in Boydell's shop in June 1775. It became the most frequently reproduced and widely distributed engraving of the ensuing century. When Woollet engraved *The Battle of La Hogue* (exhibited 1780), West avoided Boydell's claim to an equal share of the profits, by joining Woollet and Hall in an independent publishing venture. Following West's financial success, every artist began to negotiate for an engraved printing. Some artists (e.g. Henry Fuseli with Thomas Holloway) established firm collaboration with an engraver; others (e.g. Thomas Kirk) learned to engrave their own paintings.

For West, in spite of his popularity, a third set of difficulties arose. He had committed himself to historical subjects and had addressed recent military campaigns. In 1772 West was appointed History Painter to George III. In December 1773, when ships of the East India Company arrived in Boston, its cargo – 343 chests of tea worth £18,000 – was thrown into the harbor in protest of the tax of three pence a pound. As the revolutionary fervor increased in the Colonies, West's position in London, and in Court, became more trying. George III, as long as he was mentally able, never wavered in his support of West, but animosity from opponents of the American uprising was aggressive. In 1779, British troops succeeded in penetrating interior areas of Georgia and South Carolina; in May 1780, they captured General Lincoln, his 5000 men, and occupied the port of Charleston; then at Camden on 16 August 1780 Lord Cornwallis crushed the American resistance led by Horatio Gates: 2000 of whose men were killed, wounded, or captured by the British. Lord Cathcart, who had led British troops against the Americans from 1777 to 1779, resented the favor West received from the king and took malicious pleasure in reporting to him the British victory:

Lord Cathcart one day asked West, in the king's presence and in a loud voice, if he had heard the war news that morning. West replied that he had not seen the papers. Cathcart said, 'Then, sir, let me inform you that His Majesty's troops in South Carolina have gained a splendid victory over the rebels, your countrymen. This, I suppose, cannot be very pleasant news to you, Mr. West.'

West replied, 'No, sir, that is not pleasant news to me, for I never can rejoice at the misfortunes of my countrymen.'

The king had appeared not to notice the conversation, but now he turned and said to West, 'Sir, that answer does you honor.' To Lord Cathcart he said, 'Sir, let me tell you that, in my opinion, any man who is capable of rejoicing in the calamities of his coun-

2 Sales were heavy and continuous. Over the next two centuries, *Penn's Treaty* was produced in every conceivable and some inconceivable ways: on china platters, gravy boats, vegetable dishes, tin trays, bed quilts, window curtains, lamp shades, candle screens, letterheads, hand-blown glass, tavern signs, banknotes, cast-iron stove plates, medals, and Christmas cards. It was the only picture that hung in most Quaker homes in both England and America; the Friends customarily gave an engraving of it as a wedding present. The English critic Roger Fry, his sensibilities offended at seeing it so often, called it "that detestable picture." The American critic Wesley Frank Craven declared: "It is as indelibly impressed on the American mind as Washington's crossing of the Delaware." (Alberts 1978, 111); see also Brinton (1941, 99-100; 128-133).
try, can never make a good subject of any government.’ (Silliman 1805, 164-165; cited in Albert 1978, 126)³

West avoided the American Revolution as subject for his history paintings. Two exceptions were Signing of the Preliminary Treaty of Peace in 1782 (Paris, 30 November) and, when the final peace treaty was signed the following year, an allegorical representation of The Reception of the American Loyalists by Great Britain in the Year 1783. The subject-matter of both of these, of course, addressed reconciliation rather than revolution. Neither, however, was finished. The former was left incomplete with only the portraits of the American signatories completed; and the latter survives only as a “painting within a painting,” covering over one-fourth the area as background of West’s Portrait of John Eardley Wilmot (1812), the British barrister who handled claims in behalf of American loyalists to compensate losses suffered during the revolution.

Figure 1

At this stage of his career, West turned increasingly to literary subjects: Homer, Ovid, Ariosto, Tasso, Spenser, and Shakespeare. In 1775, eleven years before the first plans were made to establish a Shakespeare Gallery, West commenced his painting from Romeo and Juliet (figure 1), depicting the balcony at dawn after their secret rendezvous, the Nurse urging haste because Juliet’s mother is about to arrive.⁴ The painting was completed in 1778; the engraving by William Sharpe was published by Boydell (24 June 1783). As a companion to Romeo and Juliet, West painted Lear and Cordelia (figure 2) in 1784, depicting the scene in which Cordelia is reunited with her delirious and tormented father:

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³ Also reported in Farington, Diary (1922-1928), 1.279.
⁴ Romeo and Juliet, III.v:

JULIET. O, now be gone; more light and light it grows.
ROMEO. More light and light; more dark and dark our woes!
NURSE. Your lady mother is coming to your chamber:
The day is broke; be wary, look about.
CORDELIA. Speak to me sir, who am I?
LEAR. You are a soul in bliss: but I am bound
Upon a wheel of fire, that my own tears
Do scald like molten lead.
(King Lear [Nahum Tate's version], V.i)\(^5\)

Both paintings were sold to the Duke of Courland, Mitau, and Berlin. From the original version, an engraving was made by Daniel Berger. A second companion set, Lear and Cordelia and The Grecian Daughter (from the tragedy by Arthur Murphy) was painted for George Bowles in 1794. From this latter version of Lear and Cordelia, Richard Earlom executed an exquisitely detailed mezzotint, published by B.B. Evans (1 January 1799).\(^6\)

In November 1786, West attended a dinner hosted by Josiah Boydell at his Hampstead home. West would not have been surprised to find George Romney and Paul Sandby among the other artists invited at John Boydell's behest. The evening conversation turned, undoubtedly as rehearsed by the Boydells, to the possibility of producing "a fine Edition of Shakespeare" to rival the elegant volumes with which the French celebrated their foremost authors. As publishers of engraved prints, John Boydell and his nephew Josiah agreed that such an edition ought to be lavishly illustrated. Within a week, the Boydells announced a plan not just to publish an edition of Shakespeare but to establish as well a Shakespeare Gallery. Leading artists would be commissioned to execute a series of oil paintings depicting scenes and characters from Shakespeare's

\(^5\) In their comment on these lines, cited in Earlom's engraving, Helmut von Erffa and Allen Staley note that "[t]he words spoken by Lear are lines 46-48 of act IV, scene 7; those of Cordelia are either a fabrication or reflect some seventeenth- or eighteenth-century alteration of the Shakespeare's text" (1986, 274). The lines are from Nahum Tate's version, which shifted the concluding scene of Act IV to the opening scene of Act V. The 1808 edition of King Lear, as revised for performance by John Philip Kemble, still relies, as had David Garrick, on Nahum Tate's "happier" resolution (Shattuck 1974, vol. V, King Lear, 59).

\(^6\) For Boydell, Earlom also engraved Fuseli's Lear Banishing Cordelia (1 August 1792). Boydell had earlier commissioned Earlom to provide all 200 engravings of the works of Claude Lorrain.
plays. The paintings would be exhibited in the Gallery, and then they would be published by John and Josiah Boydell as engraved prints. For the Shakespeare Gallery, West agreed to provide two paintings, for which he received the exceptionally generous commission of £1000. As his subjects, West chose two of the mad scenes from Shakespeare (the third great mad scene, Lady Macbeth’s “Out, out damned spot,” V.i, was painted by Richard Westall).

The stage representation of Lear’s madness had for this period disturbing national resonance. When West painted *The Recovery of His Majesty in 1789*, the purpose of the painting was to depict the King’s resumption of power in March 1789, fully recovered from the bout of insanity that had incapacitated him during the previous six months. At the center, with beams of light radiating down from the parting clouds, stands George III with Queen Charlotte at his side. To the right are assembled the President of the Privy Council, Lord Camden, the Lord Chancellor, Lord Thurlow, the Prime Minister, William Pitt, and other members of the two Houses of Parliament. Behind the king, to the right, under a pillar inscribed “Science,” are Dr. Francis Willis and his son John Willis, in whose care the king had been placed during his delirium.

In Alan Bennett’s play, *The Madness of George III*, the king’s recovery is marked in a scene in which Thurlow joins Willis, Greville, and the king in reading parts from the very scene of *King Lear* which West had illustrated in *Lear and Cordelia*:

**THURLOW.** Your Majesty.
**KING.** We are reading a spot of Shakespeare. Willis, give him the book, or share.
**THURLOW.** (Sotto voce to Walls) King Lear? Is that wise?
**KING.** Willis chose it. Doctor’s orders.
**WILLIS.** I’d no idea what it was about.
**KING.** It’s my story. Now. I’m asleep apparently, and Cordelia comes in and asks the Doctor — that’s Greville — how I am, you see. Off we go.
**THURLOW.** Who’s Cordelia?
**KING.** You are. Well, Willis can’t do it. He’s hopeless. Willis. Go down there, and watch. Right then, off we go.
**THURLOW.** (As Cordelia) “O you kind gods
Cure this great breach in his abused nature.
The’untuned and jarring senses, O wind up,
Of this child-changed father.”
**KING.** That’s very good. “Child-changed father” ’s very good. Go on, Greville, you now.
**GREVILLE.** (As Doctor) “He hath slept long, be by, good madam, when we do awaken him,
I doubt not of his temperance.”
**THURLOW.** “O my dear father! Restoration hang
Thy medicine on my lips, and let this ... kiss
(THURLOW looks alarmed.)
Repair those violent harms that my sisters
Have in thy reverence made.”
**KING.** Well, kiss me, man. Come on, come on. It’s Shakespeare.
(THURLOW goes for the KING’s hand.)
**KING.** No, no. Here. man. Here. (Gives him his cheek.) Push off now. This is where the King awakens.
**THURLOW.** “How does my royal lord? How fares Your Majesty?”
**KING.** (As Lear.) “You do me wrong to take me out o’ the grave.
Thou art a soul in bliss, but I am bound
Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears
Do scald like molten lead.” (Oh, it's so true!) (Bennett 1992, 80-81)

As in Shakespeare, Bennett has made the “play within a play” serve, indeed coalesce with, the plot. At that point where Lear comes to his senses, George III asserts himself once more as king. In writing *The Madness of George III*, Bennett knew, as West did not when he painted *The Recovery of His Majesty in 1789*, that the recovery was not to be permanent. Lapses into insanity recurred throughout the next two decades, until finally, in 1810, the king was declared unfit to rule, and the Prince of Wales was appointed Regent.

West's *Lear in the Storm* (III.iv) (figure 3), the first of his two paintings for the Shakespeare Gallery, was completed in November 1788, at a time when the king's mental disturbances were causing alarm. The endeavor to read the plight of King George in the raving of King Lear, although perhaps not West's intention, was certainly part of the reception when the painting went on public display in May 1789. The heroic posturing of Lear communicates a valiant struggle rather than a passive surrender to the storm within the mind and the storm on the heath. West intensifies the dramatic moment by exhibiting the passions in vehement extremity. Lear, crossing the heath with Kent and the Fool, encounters Edgar disguised as a madman and Gloucester bearing a torch. West centers Lear in the virtual eye of the storm of passions. For the gesture of Lear, West adapted the upraised arm of Laocoon. The strong chiaroscuro cast across the scene from Gloucester's torch in the upper right not only dramatizes Lear's agony, it also highlights Lear's right arm and right leg which define the criss-cross compositional structure. Gloucester and Edgar are situated in the opposing corners, upper-left and lower-right; while Kent, his head and arm extending the line defined by Lear's gesture, occupies the space behind Lear's shoulder and the parallel line of the wooden plank that angles across the upper-right corner; in the lower-left the fool bends down to peer round Lear's outstretched leg at Edgar who is crouched on his
bed of straw. William Sharpe's finely executed line-engraving, published 25 March 1793, conveys the stunning chiaroscuro effects.

West's *Lear in the Storm* was one of the first paintings of the Shakespeare Gallery to be shipped to the United States. It was purchased in 1805 by Robert Fulton, who had it displayed on loan to the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia, until 1816. For the next twelve years it hung in the American Academy of Fine Arts, New York. In 1828, it was purchased for the Boston Athenaeum, and was deposited at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. While West was pleased with Sharpe's rendition of *Lear in the Storm*, he considered Francis Legat's rendition of *Ophelia's Madness* (figure 4), published 1 December 1802, "a very inadequate performance" (Erffa and Stanley 1986, 271). The painting went on display at the Shakespeare Gallery in 1792. At odds with Boydell's usual effort to make the engraved prints available soon after exhibition, a full ten years elapsed before the engraving was published. Together with *Lear in the Storm*, *Ophelia's Madness* was purchased by Fulton and went to the Pennsylvania Academy and then to the American Academy. In 1828, however, the two paintings parted company. From the private collection of Nicholas Longworth, it went to the Cincinnati Art Museum in 1882.

The mad dance of Ophelia (Hamlet, IV.v), which is the dramatic center of the composition, provides the *leitmotif* for the scene. The court of King Claudius has become a madhouse. Distraught at the affliction that has befallen his sister, Laertes appeals to heaven for divine aid. The guilt-tormented king looks as wild and deranged as Ophelia. The Switzers whom he has sent to "guard the door" seem, rather, to stare upon the furled banner that leans against the arch. The gentleman who brought Ophelia to court, with the news that "Her mood will needs be pitied," seems indeed to pity her strange antics, also watched by the ladies-in-waiting who stand behind the queen's throne. The queen, however, has lapsed into such deep brooding that she seems totally oblivious to those around her (Burwick 2009, 92). Ophelia's lunatic expression may have been derived from Lavater's *Physiognomic Fragments*, the English translation of
which had begun to appear in a series of heavily illustrated volumes in 1789. Fuseli not only supervised the edition, he also adapted from Lavater many of his character studies. West's Ophelia is thus a sister to Fuseli's Mad Kate (1806-1807) and a whole asylum of mad women painted during the ensuing decades.

Among the negative critics of the Shakespeare Gallery, James Gillray is the most gleefully malicious. His malice derived in part from the fact that Boydell had rejected his services as an engraver. Gillray exercised his revenge in many of his satirical plates,7 most notably in Shakespeare Sacrificed; or, The Offering to Avarice, which was published 20 June 1789, soon after the Gallery had opened. Surrounded by figures from eleven of the Gallery paintings,8 Boydell is depicted destroying the works of Shakespeare as his sacrificial offering to the wealthy subscribers. A dwarfed and deformed Shakespeare is depicted clutching the money-bags, and the Fool from West's Lear in the Storm is applying the billows to the flames.

Fuseli's painting of the witches from Macbeth provided Gillray with his satirical medium for commenting on the king's recurrent madness (published 23 December 1791). Dundas, Pitt, and Thurlow watch the royal moon half enlightened, half in darkness. Gillray acknowledges his source: "To H. Fuzelli Esq. this attempt in the Caricatura-Sublime is respectfully submitted." Mounting political difficulties – the king's faltering mental health, the increased unemployment and rising food prices, the aggressive Sedition Act prompted by fears of popular sympathy with the revolutionary cause – conspired to undermine Pitt's authority as Prime Minister. To rally support, Pitt sponsored a liberal revision of the poor laws in December 1795. On the occasion of the Estimates, Pitt was subjected to an attack in the House of Commons. Gillray's satire on this event, The Death of the Great Wolf, parodies West: "To Benjn West Esqr President of the Royal Academy, this attempt to Emulate the Beauties of his unequal'd Picture of the 'Death of Gent Wolfe,' is most respectfully submitted, by the Author" (published 17 December 1795). Pitt, the dying hero, is being supported by Dundas. Chancellor Thurlow, who has possession of the royal scepter as well as a battle axe, takes the place of West's Mohawk chieftain. In the background rank upon rank of a vast royal cavalry crush, at the extreme left, the remnants of a half-naked populace.

Mather Brown, a descendent of the Mather family and born in Boston, was twenty years of age when he arrived in London with a letter of introduction to Benjamin West from Benjamin Franklin. Brown entered the school of the Royal Academy, but worked also in West's studio. Beginning in 1783, he exhibited pieces with historical and biblical themes at the Royal Academy; after 1806, also at the British Institution (Evans 1982, 15-29). Establishing himself as a portrait painter in 1784, Brown won the support of influential friends. Along with the other American artists who gained recognition as pupils of Benjamin West (John Copley, Ralph Earle, Charles Peale, Matthew Pratt, Henry Sargeant, Edward Savage, Gilbert

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7 The Works of James Gillray: "Shakespeare Sacrificed" #380 (20 June 1789); "A Peep into the Shakespeare Gallery" #382 (26 April 1791); "The Reception of the Diplomatique & his Suite at the Court of Pekin" #88 (14 September 1792); "Titianus Redivivus" #443 (2 November 1797). Stephen Dickey, in an unpublished paper, has identified "Theatrical Mendicants, relieved" #567 (15 January 1809), as Gillray's parody of Robert Smirke's "Sixth Age," Shakespeare Gallery Cat. 1:45. [Cat. = A Catalogue of the Pictures in the Shakespeare Gallery, Pall-Mall, 1789].

8 Gerd Unverfehrt: "Shakespeare Sacrificed: Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery in Gillray's Caricatures," The Boydell Shakespeare Gallery, pp. 166-167: Cat. 11:22 Northcote; Cat. 11:21 Northcote; Cat. 11:38 Fuseli; Cat. 1:20 Fuseli; Cat. 1:33 Opie; Cat. 11:40 Barry, Cat. 11:17 Reynolds; Cat. 1:37 Fuseli; Cat. 11:14 Boydell; Cat. 11:44 Fuseli; Cat. 11:39 West.
Stuart, John Trumbill), Matthew Brown gained recognition in his own country. He did portraits of prominent American statesmen, including John Adams, his wife and daughter (1784-1785), and Thomas Jefferson (1786). Brown's full-length portraits of the Duke of York (1788) and the Prince of Wales (1789) led to his appointment as portrait painter at court, where he also painted George III (full-length portrait, 1790; *George III Receiving the Turkish Ambassador*, 1794/96).

During the same period that he was gaining high recognition in portraiture, Brown also began to experiment in theater painting. He was among the dozens of artists who accepted commissions from John Bell for his editions of *Shakspere* (20 vols. 1786-1788) and *British Theatre* (34 vols. 1791-1797). For Bell in 1786, Brown did the stage portraits of Mrs. Warren in "All's Well that Ends Well," Mr. Baddeley as Posthumus in "Cymbeline," and Mr. Kemble as King Richard in "Richard III" (IV.ii). These portraits represent the stage through posed gesture, costume, and scene backdrop. Much more expressive of the dramatic moment are his illustrations to Bell's edition of the scandalous autobiography of the actress, George Anne Bellamy, who played Juliet to David Garrick's Romeo at Covent Garden, and subsequently appeared in such roles as Cordelia, Desdemona, Lady Macbeth, and Isabella. In illustrating her *Apology*, Mather Brown recognized the theatricality of her narrative and depicted the scene in the melodramatic style of the period. With the same chiaroscuro effect that West was to achieve a few years later with Gloucester's raised torch in *Lear in the Storm*, the raised candle of the "ruffian," in *Mrs. Bellamy & Mrs. Moore, alarmed by Ruffians in their Bed chamber* (engr. Newnman; 1 March 1786), casts its light on the frantic gestures of the frightened women, on the ruffian's pistol, on the grim line of his mouth, while his eyes are totally concealed by the eclipsing shadow of his broad-brimmed hat. The following year, he did a double full-length stage portrait of Miss Brunton and Mr. Holman in "Romeo and Juliet" (1787), a painting that was exhibited in the Royal Academy. Among all of West's American disciples, Brown was the only one to join his mentor in contributing to the Shakespeare Gallery.

Brown's contribution was the scene (figure 5) from *Richard II* in which King Richard surrenders his scepter and crown to Bolingbroke (IV.i).

KING RICHARD. Give me the crown: Here, cousin seize the crown; Here, cousin, on this side, my hand; on that side, thine.

That the engraved print reveals only pageantry and panorama, rather than drama and depth, may in part be due to the same factors that caused West's dissatisfaction with Legat's engraving. The flattening effect of Benjamin Smith's stipple engraving, unlike the sculptured contours Sharpe could achieve in line-engraving, does little to capture Brown's dramatic intensity, as in III, Thomas, Earl of Surrey, Defending his Allegiance to Richard III after the Battle of Bosworth Field, 1485 (figure 6, 1795). Although trained in the studio of Francesco Bartolozzi, Smith did not have the miniaturist's patience to translate the painter's coloring into the engraved medium.

9 *An Apology for the Life of George Anne Bellamy*. Bellamy (1731-1788) was in ill health when she sought the help of Alexander Bicknell in compiling these memoirs from her letters and journals. Her purpose is to redeem her tarnished reputation by emphasizing the highlights of her acting career, and by depicting herself as a woman duped and exploited by several of the men in her life.

10 The raised torch or candle as source of light is adopted by other artists of the *Shakespeare Gallery*:

Cat. 11:23 James Northcote, *Forrest and Dighton and the slumbering Princes (Richard III, IV.iii)*;
Cat. 11:43 James Northcote, *Friar Laurence entering the Juliet's Crypt (V.iii)*; Cat. 11:47 John Graham, *Othello in Desdemona's Bed-chamber (V.ii)*.
Smith's stipple engraving of Thomas Banks's sculpture of *Shakespeare seated between the Dramatic Muse and the Genius of Painting* is satisfactory precisely because we expect to see lifeless stone, not the dynamic potential of flesh and blood. Smith, of course, has successfully retained the centrality of Bolingbroke, radiant in his white costume, while the king is half-eclipsed in shadow.

Brown apparently deemed it adequate in this scene to portray Bolingbroke as coldly aloof and dispassionate. But from Richard one expects more moving expression in handing over his crown and scepter. This is the scene, after all, in which Richard utters that passionate speech comparing himself and Bolingbroke to "two buckets, filling one another./The emptier ever dancing in the air," his own bucket, now "full of tears," descending into the depths, "whilst you mount up on high" (*Richard II*, IV.ii.181-189). The emotional charge may be wanting, but Brown has nevertheless given attention to character. He has given the king heavy-lidded eyes, suggesting perhaps his effete and languid character, his incapacity for vigorous resistance. In fact, contemporary portraits of Richard II reveal very similar heavy-lidded eyes.

One of the myths that Spooner propagated about the Shakespeare Gallery was that "[a]ll the principal historical characters are genuine portraits of the persons represented in the play; every picture gallery and old castle in England was ransacked to furnish these portraits" (Spooner 1880, vol. III, 307). That claim will not stand for ninety out of the hundred plates. James Northcote, for example, was one of the artists who preferred to paint his figures after John Philip Kemble and Sara Siddons rather than after the historical characters whom they played. In Brown's case, however, Spooner's claim has merit. The scene is crowded with some thirty figures: nine gathered with the Bishop of Carlisle and the Abbot of Westminster in the king's party to the left; six of

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1 Smith's stipple engraving of Thomas Banks's sculpture of Shakespeare seated between the Dramatic Muse and the Genius of Painting is satisfactory precisely because we expect to see lifeless stone, not the dynamic potential of flesh and blood. Smith, of course, has successfully retained the centrality of Bolingbroke, radiant in his white costume, while the king is half-eclipsed in shadow.

Brown apparently deemed it adequate in this scene to portray Bolingbroke as coldly aloof and dispassionate. But from Richard one expects more moving expression in handing over his crown and scepter. This is the scene, after all, in which Richard utters that passionate speech comparing himself and Bolingbroke to "two buckets, filling one another./The emptier ever dancing in the air," his own bucket, now "full of tears," descending into the depths, "whilst you mount up on high" (*Richard II*, IV.ii.181-189). The emotional charge may be wanting, but Brown has nevertheless given attention to character. He has given the king heavy-lidded eyes, suggesting perhaps his effete and languid character, his incapacity for vigorous resistance. In fact, contemporary portraits of Richard II reveal very similar heavy-lidded eyes.

One of the myths that Spooner propagated about the Shakespeare Gallery was that "[a]ll the principal historical characters are genuine portraits of the persons represented in the play; every picture gallery and old castle in England was ransacked to furnish these portraits" (Spooner 1880, vol. III, 307). That claim will not stand for ninety out of the hundred plates. James Northcote, for example, was one of the artists who preferred to paint his figures after John Philip Kemble and Sara Siddons rather than after the historical characters whom they played. In Brown's case, however, Spooner's claim has merit. The scene is crowded with some thirty figures: nine gathered with the Bishop of Carlisle and the Abbot of Westminster in the king's party to the left; six of

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11 Spooner also recounts the untenable story that the artists did not create their own compositions, but rather, that Boydell "advertised for designs from artists throughout Great Britain, and paid a guinea for every one submitted, whether accepted or not; and for every one accepted by the committee, a prize of one hundred guineas. The committee for selecting these designs was composed of five eminent artists, Boydell himself being the president. The first painters of the age were then employed to paint these pictures" (1880, vol. III, 305-306).
Bolingbroke's party, standing behind the fully armored Earl of Northumberland, who presents the scroll listing Richard's alleged crimes; in the alcove above Bolingbroke's party are another six figures; and through the archway between Richard and Bolingbroke can be distinguished at least nine figures among the army gathered outside Westminster Hall.

Figure 6

Dorinda Evans has identified three of Brown's visual sources: for Richard, Brown has relied on the tempera portrait in Westminster Abbey; although it was not on view during the period that Brown was in London, he would have known it through engravings. Brown has retained the heavy-lidded eyes, elongated the distinctively wispy forked beard. The features of Bolingbroke closely follow the portrait of Bolingbroke as Henry IV in the royal collection. From the royal portrait, Brown duplicates the features, the mustache and beard, as well as the turban which drapes on one side to the shoulder. The profile of Northumberland is an exact replica, reversing only the direction, from Richard Godfrey's engraving (1780) of a French manuscript miniature in the British Museum. Northumberland's armor, including the lion as helmet crest, is from Francis Grose's *Treatise on Ancient Armor* (London, 1786) (Evans 1982, 100-104; 187). Conscientious in his research, Brow endeavored to make the most of the coincidence between the two genres of history painting and theater painting.

Because Brown was one of the few artists who justified Spooner's claim that "the principal historical characters are genuine portraits of the persons represented," it is surprising that Spooner knew so little about his countryman. Indeed, did not even know that Brown was a fellow American. In his two-volume biographical dictionary of artists, one of the most thorough reference works available in the mid-19th century, Spooner records that Mather Brown was "an English painter, who lived about 1795. He painted the portraits of Cornwallis, and other English officers of his time; also several historical subjects, from the events of the war in India with Tipoo Saib, and from scenes in Shakespeare. He died in 1810" (Spooner 1873, vol. I, 143). This brief entry, and I have quoted it in its entirety, is a sad documentation of the decline of Brown's reputation.
Although, in fact, he lived until 1831, it may have seemed to many of his contemporaries that he had died in 1810. Several factors contributed to his decline.\textsuperscript{12} Even during the 1790s he experienced disappointment: the Royal Academy rejected his candidacy for membership in 1795; his collaboration with the engraver, Daniel Orme, came to an end in 1796. Then, in the ensuing years, his eyesight began to fail; interest in the "West School" of history painting declined; court patronage had been altered because of the mental instability of the king, and the concomitant efforts to nurture the Prince of Wales to assume an active political role; as had West during the revolutionary war, Brown suffered under the adverse British-American relations (British search and seizure of American ships; Jefferson's Embargo Act of 1807, and finally the War of 1812). He left London for Bath in 1808, and spent the final two decades of his career in Liverpool and Manchester. With his eyesight failing, he lost visual command of the canvas. His historical paintings of this latter period failed to move beyond the style he had adopted early in his career; indeed, in composition and coloring, they even fall below that standard. As early as 1802, he turned to soft-ground etching, a medium which further strained his eyesight, but allowed him to pursue close work with a magnifying glass. His subjects were allegorical and sentimental, designed primarily as exercise models for young ladies to practice their drawing. Responding to the immense popularity of Lord Byron's \textit{The Corsair} (1814), Brown executed a fine pencil and water-color sketch, \textit{Conrad in Chains} (Canto II, xi). Like the nearsighted Benjamin Robert Hayden, Brown during his final years had to divide his canvas into small squares and develop his painting segment-by-segment. One of his late works, \textit{The Battle of the Nile} (1825) is wonderful in its detail, but is chaotic confusion in its composition.

Had Spooner known more about Brown's career, he would presumably have recognized that the portrait of his uncle, \textit{Dr. William Spooner} (1785),\textsuperscript{13} had been painted by Brown. Shearjashub Spooner (December 3, 1809 – March 14, 1859) was a descendant of the William Spooner who came to New Plymouth in 1637 as an indentured apprentice (Spooner, T. 1871 and 1883). His father and grandfather were carpenters. His uncle and his four brothers became physicians. At the age of eighteen he joined one of these older brothers, Dr. John Roach Spooner, in Montreal where he commenced his own studies of the classics and medicine. From general medicine he turned to dentistry: he attended the New York Medical College and, in 1835, obtained the degree of Doctor of Medicine from the College of Physicians and Surgeons.\textsuperscript{14} Seven years later he had gained sufficient wealth from his practice to retire from dentistry and pursue his passion for art. While in Europe in 1842 he purchased the old copper plates of John Boydell's illustrations of Shakespeare. These plates were carefully restored and in 1852 he reprinted them in a two-volume edition.

In the quality of the prints, Spooner's edition can scarcely be distinguished from Boydell's edition. Rather than retracing the engraver's burin work, Spooner's restoration consisted of a careful cleaning of the plates, removing residual ink and paper fibers. The technology of printing had advanced in the half-century since the Boydell production. Gelatin inking rollers, for example, would allow a smoother

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\item \textsuperscript{12} See Evans on the decline of his reputation (1982, 122-123; 132-133; 137; 151; 158; 174).
\item \textsuperscript{13} Evans gives no present location for Brown's portrait, "Dr. William Spooner;" she lists the last known provenance as "Dr. Leslie M. Spooner, a descendant, Clarendon St., Boston, 1915" (1982, 230).
\item \textsuperscript{14} The first publications of Spooner's career were: \textit{An Inaugural Dissertation on the Physiology and Diseases of the Teeth} (1835); \textit{Guide to Sound Teeth, or A Popular Treatise on the Teeth} (1836); \textit{An Essay on the Art of the Manufacture of Mineral, Porcelain, or Incorruptible Teeth} (1838).
\end{itemize}
distribution of the ink than the linen daubers in Boydell's printshop; the gear-and-
spring mechanism on the rolling press would allow Spooner's printers to adjust for
optimum pressure with minimum wear to the copper surface (Bloy 1967, 10). Pressure
damage, of course, had already occurred, and was evident in some of the
cross-hatching of the line engravings, such as the fine lines that define the contours in
the highlighted areas of Sharpe's engraving of West's Lear in the Storm. Pressure damage
also caused the flattening of the background stipple, eradicating the nuances of shading
that defined perspective and depth. This is evident not only in the poorly articulated
stipple of Smith's engraving of Brown's Richard II Resigning his Crown to Bolingbroke,
but even in the delicate background stippling of Caroline Watson's engraving of Francis
Wheatley's Ferdinand and Miranda playing at Chess, in which the figures of Prospero
and Alonso lose all dimension and become mere shadows on the wall of the cave.

Spooner's contribution to the restoration of late 18th-century engraving might have
been even greater had the U.S. government not imposed an obstacle. During that same
trip to Europe in 1842, he had also discovered in Paris the plates of two celebrated
French works of art, the Musée Français and the Musa Royal. In addition to the 100
plates of the Shakespeare Gallery, he purchased the 522 French plates. Upon their
arrival in New York, however, he found that huge import duties had been levied against
the shipment. He petitioned Congress for an exemption, and published an eloquent ap-
peal for the government to allow works of art to be brought into the country free of duty:
An Appeal to the People of the United States, in Behalf of Art, Artists, and the Public
Weal (1854). That endeavor failed, as did his subsequent offer to donate the set of cop-
per-plates to the Smithsonian Institution Washington, D.C., if it would agree to pay the
duty and carry out his plan to restore the plates and reissue the prints. After the Smith-
sonian declined, Spooner had no alternative but to ship the plates back to France.

In addition to his restoration of the Shakespeare Gallery, Spooner compiled two
major reference works: Anecdotes of Painters, Engravers, Sculptors, and Architects,
and Curiosities of Art (3 vols., 1850), and A Biographical and Critical Dictionary of
Painters, Engravers, Sculptors, and Architects (2 vols., 1853). In both of these works,
it should be noted, Spooner gives engravers equal status alongside painters, sculptors,
and architects. His commentaries on their contribution documents their unique service
in making art available to the masses. Throughout the latter half of the 19th century,
these works were standard authorities and went through numerous editions. In 1854,
Spooner fell victim to a nervous disorder which undermined his health. He died five
years later (14 March 1859) at the age of forty-nine. As part of his ambitious survey,
Spooner's Biographical History provides useful accounts of John Boydell, Josiah
Boydell, Benjamin West, and many of the Boydell artists. After the Shakespeare
Gallery had suffered neglect in its native county, Spooner brought it to America, gave
it new life, and helped shape its critical reception in the United States.

Illustrations

Figure 1. Benjamin West: Romeo and Juliet (III.v), (1778); engraved by William
Sharpe (24 June 1783).

15 Gelatin inking rollers were not invented until 1819, and were not in common use until 1850. See also
Hind (1963, 76-78).
16 Spooner's obituary appeared in the New York Herald, March 18, 1859.
17 Spooner on John Boydell (1873 vol. I, 132-134); on Josiah Boydell (1873, vol. I, 134); on Benjamin
Figure 2. Benjamin West: Lear and Cordelia (Tate's version, V.i), (1794); engraved by Richard Earlm (1 January 1799).

Figure 3. Benjamin West: Lear in the Storm (King Lear, III.iv), (1788); engraved by William Sharpe (25 March 1793).

Figure 4. Benjamin West: Ophelia's Madness (Hamlet, IV.v), (1792); engraved by Francis Legat, 1802.

Figure 5. Mather Brown: King Richard Surrenders Crown and Scepter to Bolingbroke (Richard II, IV.i), (25 July 1791); engraved by Benjamin Smith (4 June 1801).

Figure 6. Mather Brown: Earl of Surrey, Defending his Allegiance to Richard III, after Battle of Bosworth Field (ca. 1795).

Works Cited


