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Shakespeare and the New Palace of Westminster (1834–1927)

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ABSTRACT

This article explores how the art and architecture of the New Palace of Westminster (home to the UK's Houses of Parliament) evoke a theatrical experience underpinned by 'Shakespearean' aesthetics. Over a series of artistic commissions from the 1840s to the 1920s, artists instrumentalised Shakespeare both explicitly and implicitly as part of the wider schemes within which they worked. Doing so, they visualised and even theatricalised the political and artistic aims of their commissioners and sought to project a unified sense of national history and contemporary aesthetic taste. The three case studies from within the Palace discussed here therefore offer a concentrated reception history of Shakespeare. This reading of the Palace's visual arts thereby sharpens our understanding of Shakespeare's developing roles in British national conception. It brings together print, theatrical, and art history with attention to architecture and design, as well as archival details, to offer an interdisciplinary analysis of Shakespeare's role in constitutional expressions of British identity – not least during a major period of imperial activity and at the very seat of parliamentary power.

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The New Palace of Westminster only contains two explicitly Shakespearean wall paintings. Yet its decorative scheme is partly shaped by the historical and aesthetic influences of the playwright, his work, and its afterlives. The medieval and early modern palace was (with the exception of Westminster Hall and some other adjoining structures) destroyed by fire in 1834. It was rebuilt over three successive decades in extraordinary neo-gothic fashion by its architect Charles Barry and designer Augustus Pugin. Their design efforts were matched by one of the largest state-funded painting programmes in British history. The Fine Arts Commission, who had charge of schemes across the

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Palace, formed to deliver narrative historical mural schemes on a vast scale, with the aim of galvanising 'proper […] national taste'.[1] The ambitious project to fill the Palace with wall paintings continued, in phases between stops and starts, into the early twentieth century. Shakespearean cultural capital and the age of British history for which the playwright sometimes stands as cipher are key influences on and features of this decorative scheme.

Over a series of artistic commissions from the 1840s to the 1920s, artists Charles West Cope, Daniel Maclise, John Rogers Herbert, Henry Albert Payne, William Rothenstein, and Alfred Kingsley Lawrence instrumentalised Shakespeare both explicitly and implicitly. Doing so, they visualised and even theatricalised the political and artistic aims of their commissioners: to make the New Palace of Westminster a royal and constitutional expression of British identity, and in so doing to project a unified historical community and a contemporary aesthetic one. Not only did Westminster artists hone their genre via illustrations of the playwright's works, but ambitions for the Palace were directly informed by contemporary and eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Shakespearean visual histories. The many (and ongoing) stages of decoration make the large estate, home to the United Kingdom's Parliament, not only a 'palace of varieties'[2] but a palimpsest – one that serves, I suggest here, as a case study for a concentrated reception (and remediation) history of Shakespeare.[3] There have been important and informative studies on the Palace's symbolism and its wider contexts (including history painting),[4] as well as a raft of important considerations of the period's visual engagements with Shakespeare.[5] More broadly, critics and historians have established the playwright's role in nation-building[6]; particularly pertinent here is how the playwright gained renewed centrality to national memorialisation in the 1910s and 1920s (either side of the Great War) at the same time as British writers viewed him as an international symbol, a 'world-poet'.[7] Yet to date there has been little appreciation of the extent to which the building at the centre of the UK's democratic processes responded to and shaped Shakespeare's canonisation. The destruction of the former Palace just two years after the first Great Reform Act (1832) represented a 'reset' moment

[1]Eastlake, *Contributions*, 31–2.

[2]Cannadine, 'Palace of Westminster'.

[3]The *Shakespeare and the Royal Collections* project has paved the way for understanding how Shakespearean material and visual culture might shape buildings and collections in the royal household: see forthcoming publications and Tambling, 'Bard boy.'

[4]*Art in Parliament*; Cooke, *The Palace of Westminster*; Hartley, *Democratising*; *The Houses of Parliament: History, Art, Architecture*; *Works of Art in the House of Lords*; see also Linda Colley's crucial work on nation-formation through images, *Britons*, and Mitchell, *Picturing*; Strong, *And when did you last* ; Willesdon, *Mural Painting*.

[5]See, in particular, Barnden, *Still Shakespeare*; Laporte, *Victorian Cult*; Poole, *Shakespeare and the Victorians*; Sillars, *Shakespeare, Time and the Victorians* and *The Illustrated Shakespeare, 1709–1875*. Prince has crucially demonstrated the rapidly growing presence of Shakespeare in the nineteenth century across British politics, history, and aesthetic debates, *Shakespeare in the Victorian Periodicals*.

[6]Dobson, *Making*; Smith, *Shakespeare's First Folio*; Bate, *The Romantics on Shakespeare*.

[7]For discussions of these energies via Sir Israel Gollancz in 1916, see McMullan, 'Goblin's Market.' Gollancz qtd. 190.

for the country; in its wake, architects, artists, and writers, just as much as politicians and the wider public, debated what exactly represented Britain's 'national' style. Schemes in the early twentieth century renewed this concern for the best style and subjects for national representation. The link between Shakespeare and Westminster therefore speaks to a broader taste-making relationship between literature, theatre, and the visual arts. It also emphasises Shakespeare's fluid but fundamental importance – both aesthetically and politically – for ideas of 'Britishness' at home and abroad in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

As well as reflecting and perpetuating the playwright's cultural influence, the works I discuss here all channel the Tudoresque theatricality of the New Palace of Westminster. The building was and is defined by notions of Tudorness; Pugin described the vast structure as 'Tudor details on a classic body'.[8] The edifice also has strong affinities with Victorian theatre – not only for the pageantry of formal ceremonies and wider theatre of state, but in its very conception: Barry envisaged narrative routes through the building,[9] while the interior features are in many ways an exercise in elaborate set design. After all, Pugin cut his teeth as a stage furnisher in Covent Garden and sharpened his aesthetic principles while fashioning the set of Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* (with Charles Kemble in the lead) in 1831.[10] Not only does the Palace resemble an architectural-theatrical set, but like any working theatre its artistic backdrops were in continual alteration. The Palace thereby offers a way to analyse the growth of Shakespearean canonicity and exceptionalism over some 80 years – during a period when 'bardolatry' became a near-religious phenomenon and a tool of colonial expansion.[11]

I accordingly discuss three stages of distinct but related Shakespearean presence in the Palace: (1) the background to the Fine Arts Commission (which oversaw the initial artistic scheme) and its Shakespeare-heavy cartoon competitions in the 1840s, resulting in the first frescoes in the Lords' Chamber; (2) the explicit Shakespearean representation in Upper Waiting Hall (also known as Poets' Hall) in the 1840s and 1850s; and (3) freshly-commissioned schemes between 1908 and 1927. The start of the twentieth century saw a renewed vigour from Speakers and committees in Parliament for decorating spaces left incomplete by the Victorian Fine Arts Commission. Their energies coincided with a period, beginning before the Great War and sharpened by it, in which wider cultural commemorations of Shakespeare became 'vehicles for the concerns of the moment',[12] with a close connection to the 'Elizabethan

[8]Eastlake, *A History of the Gothic Revival*, 183.
[9]For an account of his plans and their execution, see Shenton, *Mr Barry's War*.
[10]He worked on the production, with scenes in Westminster Hall, while preparing material for Scarisbrick Hall – a key model for his work in Westminster. Hill, *God's Architect*, 83, 183.
[11]The word was coined by George Bernard Shaw in his preface for *Three Plays for Puritans* (1906); for an account of this development and its religiosity, see Laporte, *Victorian Cult*. Marcus, *How Shakespeare Became Colonial*.
[12]Calvo and Kahn, 'Introduction,' 13.

world' from which he emerged. These concerns looked both inward to a national history and outward to a global one. Paintings (even those not explicitly Shakespearean) accordingly draw on dramatic imagination and emerge from a decade in which Shakespeare, Tudor-ness, and empire were deeply interlinked across architecture, art, and editing.

The different layers and periods of design across these years remind us that the notion and exact nature of Shakespeare as a national poet and cipher for British identity (and in turn empire) was not fixed[13]; accordingly, they provide strong examples for scrutinising the establishment of 'the Shakespeare myth'.[14] The building of the Palace, in other words, runs parallel to a continued building of the 'Bard'. The presence of the Shakespearean on Parliament's walls testifies to the impression of popular print and theatrical culture on the design and experience of the Palace of Westminster and to Shakespeare's developing roles in attempts to establish a collective British historical and creative consciousness.

History: A Cartoon Background (1840–9)

As the Palace was being built, a loose group of members and professional experts, under the leadership of Prince Albert, began to take ownership of its artistic direction. By 1841, the group had formalised within Parliament as the Fine Arts Commission, which sought to 'inquire the mode in which, by means of the interior decoration […] the Fine Arts of this country can be most effectually encouraged'.[15] Sir Charles Eastlake, the painter and essayist, assumed secretaryship of the group. His reports to Parliament and published writings record much of the Palace's art developments up to 1861 (the year of the Prince Consort's death and effective end of systematic decorative plans for the estate). From the outset, then, this was a project of national tastemaking, concerned with British artistic development. Despite Albert's interest in the German style of painting developed by the Nazarenes – a revived fresco and wall painting movement that equally impressed others on the commission and had a deep influence on its decision-making – it was ultimately both British artists and subjects who had primacy. Indeed, the Commission ran this unprecedentedly vast public patronage project via a series of cartoon competitions open only to 'British Artists' (shortly after amended to make clear this meant any artist who had lived in the country for ten years or more). The advert

[13]For starting points (pertinent to this article) on Shakespeare's uses in national formation, see Foster and Murphy, 'Shakespeare, Ethnicity, and Nationalism,' 186–8; Marcus; Prince explores the rise of nationalist approaches to Shakespeare in the eighteenth century, 'Shakespeare and English Nationalism.'

[14]See Holderness, *The Shakespeare Myth*; in their account of adaptation studies, Fischlin and Fortier describe this as 'the virtual Shakespeare: a colossus, within whom all history congeals and against whom the imaginary essence of a nation, its 'thought,' is to be measured,' 'Introduction,' 16.

[15]*Report of the Commissioners of the Fine Arts*, with Appendix, 22 April 1842, 4.

for the first competition explained that 'each artist is at liberty to select his subject from British History, or from the works of Spenser, Shakspeare, or Milton'.[16] These three writers serve as shorthand for an English literary 'Renaissance' and, with Shakespeare at the centre, underpin the expressions of nationhood explored in this article.

The Commission itself would have ultimate scope to determine the general topics, but, as we shall see, the competition entries from 1843 and 1844 indicate the success of several artists in pushing themes and subjects that found their way into the final scheme. Eastlake's commentary on this process indicates something of the sentiment of the Commission and its impetus. In an appendix to the Commission's second report in 1843, later re-published in *Contributions to the Literature of Fine Art* (1848), he emphasised the importance of historical painting as 'not only generally fittest for decoration on a large scale', but most in need of state-sponsored encouragement.[17] He called for a new 'consistency of style' that represented a British approach to history painting, aligning its subjects with what he describes as the discovery of 'proper […] national taste'. Eastlake also acknowledged the collaborative relationship between artist and commissioner in this process, 'for it must always be borne in mind that the aims of the artists are not to be considered as accidental predilections apart from the public feeling, but as representing a portion of that feeling'.[18] Shakespeare had become, over the previous half century or more, increasingly central to such a question of 'national taste',[19] as well as to historical painting.

Indeed, two major artistic projects served as important precedents for the Fine Arts Commission: John Boydell's 'Shakespeare Gallery' and Robert Bowyer's historical scheme devised for David Hume's *History of England*. Boydell's serialised Shakespeare editions appeared from 1791 to 1802 and proved a major moment in British book illustration as well as Shakespearean reception history. The original paintings for the editions were themselves exhibited at a physical 'Shakespeare Gallery' at 52 Pall Mall, ultimately home to 167 artworks by over thirty artists.[20] The gallery aimed not only to enhance the visual immediacy of Shakespeare's texts in Romantic aesthetics but more ambitiously to 'advance that art towards maturity', Boydell claimed, 'and establish an English School of Historical Painting' – words that closely mirror Eastlake's own some forty to fifty years later. For Boydell, 'no subjects seem so proper to form' such a school 'as the scenes of immortal Shakespeare'.[21] By the early nineteenth century, then, the playwright is firmly aligned in the visual arts with the slippery notion of national taste and perceptions of British (or, more properly, English) history.

[16]*Report*, 1842, 7.
[17]Eastlake, *Contributions*, 20–30.
[18]Ibid., 31–2.
[19]See the account of these years from Dobson and Watson, *England's Elizabeth*.
[20]For an overview of images in Gallery, see the RomanticIllustrationNetwork.com/shakespeare-gallery.
[21]Boydell, 'Preface.'

Boydell's success in this aim has since been debated by scholars,[22] but his gallery had a close relationship with an illustrated series even more squarely concerned with national history. 'In 1792, Robert Bowyer published a prospectus for an illustrated edition of Hume with sixty large pictures', Holger Hoock explains, and 'Bowyer bought or commissioned from leading history painters, who represented English history not in an antiquarian tradition, but […] instead, in sentimental terms'.[23] Stuart Sillars recognises the 'closeness between history and [Shakespeare's] plays' in Hume's writing, which draws on fictionalised conversations between historical figures in an 'approachable narrative style'.[24] Inevitably, many of the subjects in the two series overlapped, a result of the many imaginings of Shakespeare's history plays as serious (if sentimentalised) insight into the British past. Most tellingly, a number of the artists who worked on the Hume illustrations had also been a part of Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery. T. S. R. Boase goes so far as to suggest Bowyer's illustrations – similarly exhibited as paintings in his house on Pall Mall up to 1807 (a near neighbour of Boydell's large gallery) – were 'the main precedent for the historical schemes devised for the Houses of Parliament'.[25]

While these two gallery spaces helped shape the possibilities of grand national storytelling through the arts, later developments in illustration also seem to have informed the cartoon competitions at Westminster. Where Boydell's and Bowyer's schemes comprised Romantic, emotionally legible figures, publications exactly contemporary with the Fine Arts Commission were busy combining the forensically antiquarian with the sentimental in ways that prefigure the Palace's arresting and well-researched wall paintings. Charles Knight's *Pictorial Shakspere* series was published through the late 1830s and 1840s, the last issued in 1843 – the year of the first fresco cartoon competition in Westminster Hall. These popular and wide-reaching editions aimed to spread 'moral, historical and practical education of all kinds to the lower social ranks, an enterprise in which morality was linked with entertainment and social advancement, seen within a frame of national identity'[26]—aims that again recall Eastlake's hopes for the Palace. Knight's illustrations folded in meticulous research about the time periods of the plays' settings and looked beyond emotional veracity towards

> the Realities upon which the imagination of the poet must have rested. There were the localities of the various scenes, whether English or foreign: the portraits of the real personages of the historical plays […] accurate costume in all its rich variety.[27]

[22]Sillars suggests it 'failed,' while Dias argues that it played a part in 'generating and promoting a version of the English School,' p. 291. Sillars, *Illustrated*, 181–82; Dias, 'John Boydell's.'
[23]Langham, 'Struggling,' 581.
[24]Sillars, *Illustrated*, 211–12.
[25]Boase, 'Decoration,' 337.
[26]Sillars, *Shakespeare, Time*, 40–41.
[27]Knight, *Passages*, 284.

In doing so, the edition compounded the relationship between Shakespeare and the British past established in Boydell's and Bowyer's earlier figurations. Such Shakespeare editions therefore provided one model for the historical world-building at the centre of many of the Palace's narrative schemes. Indeed, the steady rise of an antiquarian mindset across the arts was shaped by the period's Shakespeare scholarship and performance.[28]

Knight's editions, like those of Kenny Meadows the same decade, responded to an emerging theatrical concern for 'super-realism and authenticity' led by the likes of Charles Kean and Charles Kemble on London's stages.[29] The renewed interest in Shakespearean histories influenced not only the entrants to the cartoon competition (as we shall see) but the Palace's very architectural design: an act of gothic revival that runs close to the meticulous detailing of costume and backdrop for productions (culminating in Kean's *Richard II* in 1857). 'As the Gothic Revival gained great cachet, both in architecture and literature', Jacqueline Riding explains, 'the staging of Shakespeare's lesser-known medieval histories […] became a viable proposition'.[30] Kean's production included a detailed recreation of Westminster Hall in the Covent Garden theatre (by then familiar to audiences through the cartoon competition displays and media reports and images). Shakespeare therefore provides a convenient bookend for the first wave of the new Parliament building's beautification: beginning with Pugin's own creation of medieval Westminster for Kemble's *Henry VIII* in the 1830s and culminating in Kean's theatrical, visual, and historical extravaganza.

Not only was Shakespeare explicitly named alongside 'Subject[s] from British history' as a prompt for the Westminster cartoon competitions, then, but his work was aligned with historical representation and its simultaneous national, moral, and antiquarian value. The list of cartoons for the first competition in 1843 included 16 Shakespearean scenes (11.43% of the total submission number of 140). Although comparable with subjects from Spenser and Milton, entrants also emphasised the alignment of Shakespeare with historical subjects by using the playwright to caption or explain other events; entry 137, the Bark of the Prosperous, for instance, instructs, 'there is a tide, &c, *vide* Shakespeare', citing *Julius Caesar* as commentary for the ship's departure for Virginia in 1611. The term *vide* (Latin for 'see') follows the more frequent direction in these cartoons towards historical texts and authorities. The final entry, 140, 'Britannia Victrix', is captioned with 'This sceptr'd Isle' from *Richard II*.[31] These citations suggest a parallel between Shakespeare and historical authorities, not least given that Hume's *History of England* was another favourite

[28]For context on antiquarian biographies, see Schoenbaum; for Shakespeare and antiquarianism, see Hill's thesis, 'Antiquaries.'
[29]Sillars, *Illustrated*, 256.
[30]Riding, ''My gorgeous Palace'', 91.
[31]ARC/VAR/6, 110.

among competitors for establishing historical detail and its national significance (a further link with the visual influences of the Boydell gallery and the Bowyer schemes).[32] In the 1844 competition, Hume's account is attached to one of the historical subjects ultimately selected for the House of Lords – Prince Henry (later Henry V) acknowledging the authority of Lord Chief Justice Gascoigne.[33] The application of Shakespearean epithets to historical subjects and his influence on histories like Hume's indicates just how deeply the entrants' historical imaginations were shaped by the visual-textual worlds of early nineteenth-century Shakespearean print – at once antiquarian and theatrical.

The Fine Arts Commission ultimately awarded the first commissions – for the Lords' Chamber – to Dyce, Maclise, Cope, and Horsley. Three were to be allegorical figurations, with their opposite numbers to show a historical representation of the abstract subject. Cope aligned with many others from the 1844 competition in selecting Henry and Lord Chief Justice Gascoigne (WOA 2966; completed 1849), which would sit opposite Maclise's *Spirit of Justice* (WOA 2967, 1849). While the scene might seem like a rather niche moment of constitutional history, it is of structural importance to Shakespeare's *2 Henry IV* (a play concerned with parliamentary process).[34] The Lord Chief Justice rebukes Falstaff at the outset for his antics and ill influence on the prince and more or less concludes the drama by restating the relationship of the monarch to parliamentary power, and vice versa. He therefore offers a fitting subject for 'Justice' in the House of Lords Figure 1.

Although the arrest of Prince Hal is not shown in the play, the final act includes two lengthy meditations on the encounter. The Lord Chief Justice fears he will be in poor regard with the new King, and Henry notes how he did 'Rate, rebuke, and roughly send to prison / Th'immediate heir of England' (5.2.68–70). Yet the Lord Chief Justice implacably questions any disrespect for the laws and processes of the country (5.2.81, 85–7). The sword itself is presented in the left of the composition by a figure of the court, who holds it partly extended towards Prince Hal: poised between offering and possessing its symbolic power. The gesture follows Shakespeare's balance between parliamentary authority and princely overreaching, while simultaneously observing royal instruction (in the form of the late Henry IV's orders). Such details sharpen the scene's relationship to the House of Lords beyond the commentary included in the likes of Hume. The two title figures mirror each other in their poses, with their left hands extended outward: one in a pronounced gesture of authority and the other in a quiet one.

In these guises, Hal and the Lord Chief Justice signify both peers' powers and their duties. Shakespeare's Henry, after all, admits, 'You are right, Justice, and

[32]See, for instance, Ibid., 118.
[33]In R. W. Buss's submission, Ibid., 174.
[34]Only *3 Henry VI* rivals the play's interest in parliamentary process.

Figure 1. Prince Henry Acknowledging the Authority of Chief Justice Gascoigne, Fresco painting by Charles West Cope © UK Parliament, WOA 2966 heritagecollections.parliament.uk

you weigh this well. / Therefore still bear the balance and the sword' (5.2.101–2). The scene centres on an acknowledgement of the importance of 'our high court of Parliament', 'That the great body of our state may go / In equal rank with the best-governed nation […] / In which you, father, shall have foremost hand' (5.2.133–9). The discarded hat and gloves on the stair at the mural's front left hints at the Prince's growing maturity through the play: an oversized feather suggests the putting away of youthful exuberance, as he moves in this precise

moment towards the greater circumspection befitting the head that wears the crown. While Gascoigne himself is not named in Shakespeare's play, Knight's *Pictorial Shakspere* – published just five years before Cope's commission and two before the open competition – included in Act 1 a portrait of the Lord Chief Justice titled 'Sir W. Gascoyne' drawn 'from the effigy on his tomb'.[35] The explanatory note observes that the 'Lord Chief Justice, introduced in this scene – and who appears more prominently in the fifth Act, – was Sir William Gascoyne, Chief Justice of the King's Bench', and gives some biographical details based on recent scholarship.

Justice is therefore figured through a recognisably Shakespearean lens. Cope himself would go on to help create the 'Shakespeare Room' in Isambard Kingdom Brunel's house, directly inspired by these historical frescoes at Parliament.[36] Maclise's opposing image of the emblematic figure herself contextualises and even critiques the theatrical moment of *2 Henry IV*. Maclise would have understood well the Shakespearean resonances of the Palace's developing historical themes. Just a few years earlier, he completed his engraving, *Play Scene in Hamlet* (1842), which contained many of the stylistic details required by Westminster. Sillars calls the image a 'fusion' of the play's different scenes into one representative tableau[37] – a similar feat to Cope's depiction of Henry and Gascoigne, which balances didacticism, drama, and sovereign nobility. Maclise's engraving also draws on recent stagings by the like of William Charles Macready (Figure 2).

Maclise's theatricalised work for Westminster suggests how historically-attuned engravings or illustrations and lingeringly sentimental fine arts painting might merge into a new style. Nancy Weston acknowledges Maclise's meticulous research for his Palace paintings, rooted not only in historical accuracy but in topical references to race and gender.[38] Fittingly, then, Justice in the Lords' Chamber is recognisable as Caroline Norton – a writer and controversial campaigner for divorce and women's rights who had herself been involved in a scandal. (She was accused of committing adultery with Lord Melbourne, making the choice of model, given the fresco's location, especially bold). Norton was also widely noted for her 'theatricality', remarked upon by contemporaries, and she herself performed in masques and displays in 'transfigurations' that employed 'allegory and exotic imagery'.[39] The painting therefore channels both abstract associations and the real-life self-presentation of its sitter. In *Spirit of Justice*, Maclise references the emancipation of slaves and the recent Slavery Abolition Act (1833), including at the feet of Justice a Black figure whose shackles are cast off on the floor in the forefront of the painting. Yet 'though his chains

[35]Cited from later revised edition, *Pictorial*, 243–44.
[36]See Faberman and McEvansoneya, 'Isambard.'
[37]Sillars, *Time*, 71–72.
[38]See Weston, *Daniel Maclise*.
[39]Dolin, 'The Transfigurations of Caroline Norton,' 504.

Figure 2. *Spirit of Justice,* Fresco painting by Daniel Maclise © UK Parliament, WOA 2967 heritagecollections.parliament.uk.

have been removed', Kieran Dolin observes, 'he remains in an abject, kneeling position […] he is not worshipping justice, but awaiting it'.[40] The depiction expands the Westminster mural's focus beyond the white (often male) royal figures elsewhere in the Palace, but the 'abject' portrayal of Black individuals uncomfortably aligns with some of the wider race-making strategies of Victorian visual culture.[41]

[40]Ibid., 517.
[41]See Barringer, 'Images of Otherness.'

More broadly, Maclise's composition contains formal inversions of Cope's. In a subtle difference from Hal's discarded hat and gloves, a gauntlet lies in front of Justice: a moment of challenge rather than conciliation. While the 'balance and sword', Justice's familiar emblems, sit towards the back of the scene, the cuffed prisoner's bloody knife is offered before her. With Maclise, it is the symbols of perverted or wild justice, or of injustice awaiting intervention, that stand out. Where Cope's image draws its authority from a recognisably Shakespearean significance and a (predominantly English) narrative as the 'best-govern'd nation', Maclise looks instead to contemporary figures and ongoing injustices to respond quietly to a Victorian fantasy of Tudorism 'informed and driven by cultural nationalism'.[42] At the same time, the *Spirit of Justice*'s theatrical qualities (as embodied by Norton herself) help establish the Palace artists' implicit preoccupation with the stage and its moral and historical affordances – both triumphalist and ambivalent.

Fiction: A Canon in Upper Waiting Hall

National history painting met with literary exceptionalism in the Fine Arts Commission's vision for the Palace. The Victorian schemes therefore both reflected and shaped two parallel canons: a timeline of key historical events and a sharpening of the literary canon.[43] It was only in the immediately preceding years that 'new forms of public education, both institutional and informal, and ingenious new methods of cultural promotion made the processes of canon formation both more complex and more widespread'.[44] The so-called Poets' Hall at Westminster accordingly offers insight into fast-developing attitudes towards English literary greatness and, most keenly with Shakespeare, the instrumentalisation of literary capital for political ends.[45] These frescoes also, like the Lords' Chamber, indicate the Palace's crucial relationship to the role of theatre and literature in public life and to the precarious notion of a 'national' taste.

In 1845, the Commission proposed the second scheme to be initiated, with its final frescoes completed between 1848 and 1854, in 'a hall […] called the Upper Waiting Hall'.[46] An earlier proposition for statuary had set out a wider canon of the 1840s: the 'distinguished persons' of Chaucer, Spenser, Earl of Surrey, Shakespeare, Milton, Addison, Richardson, Dr Johnson, Cowper, Sir Walter Scott.[47] For the frescoes, the Commission in turn awarded the work to Edward Armitage (*The Personification of the Thames*

[42]Dobson and Watson, *England's Elizabeth*, 133.
[43]On the Victorian developments of the literary canon, and its patriarchal bias, see Chapman, 'Achieving Fame.' For an overview of the process of canonisation up to 1800, see Gorak, 'Canons and Canon Formation.'.
[44]Stange, '1887,' 159.
[45]The frescoes in the Upper Waiting Hall were only conserved in the 1980s, up to which point they had suffered (soon after completion) from pollution and spoilation and had long been covered up.
[46]Fifth Report of the Commissioners of the Fine Arts, 1845, 7.
[47]Fourth Report of the Commissioners of the Fine Arts, 1845.

and the English Rivers from Pope's *Windsor Forest* [WOA 2887] and *Death of Marmion* from Walter Scott's Marmion [2888]); Cope (*Griselda's First Trial of Patience* from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* [2882] and *Death of Lara* from Byron's poem [2889]); John Calcott Horsley (*Satan Touched by Ithuriel's Spear While Whispering Evil Dreams to Eve* from Milton's *Paradise Lost* [2885]); John Rogers Herbert (*King Lear Disinheriting Cordelia* from Shakespeare's *King Lear* [2884]); John Tenniel (*St Cecilia's Song* by John Dryden [2886]); and George Watts (*The Red Cross Knight Overcoming the Dragon* in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* [2883]). The following report emphasised the hope of determining 'a complete scheme' for which, 'in the selection of subjects, the chief object to be regarded should be the expression of some specific idea; and the second, its illustration by means of some well-known historic or poetic incident adapted for representation in painting'.[48] This conclusion seems to stem from the work of those artists in Upper Waiting, who each took on a poetic image or subject from the English canon.

While each of these poets and writers held important places in the literary canon by the turn of the nineteenth century, Shakespeare had a 'new centrality' firmly established by 1800 'as the yardstick for each emerging scholarly, critical, and poetic category'.[49] It is perhaps for this reason that Herbert's Lear became one of the more publicly discussed artworks in the 1840s and 1850s to emerge from the Fine Arts Commission. Nancy Langham's study of the fresco and its reception emphasises the positive reviews in publications like *The Art Journal* and *The Athenaeum*, which found the scene and its rendering 'highest in the sentiment of human expression' and of 'high importance' and 'superiority'[50] – a blending of literary as well as art criticism that sees in Shakespearean visual adaptations *pathos* and an exceptionalism that rendered such pictures ever-increasingly popular over these years. Even *Punch* lent its satirical pen to the image, punning on the idea of 'Lear' and 'leer' in suggesting it might be an inappropriate 'sight for a Queen'.[51] The widespread reception perhaps testifies to the usefulness of Shakespeare for wider discussions of style and taste in the periodical press, from fine art to education Figure 3.

Indeed, the playwright was an increasing trope in public life and debate, not only in elite spaces but across the social spectrum. Working-class movements found in Shakespeare the possibility of new vocabularies for resistance and 'respectability'. The wider scheme of Poets' Hall represents a snapshot of an English literary tradition that lay at the heart of such movements. 'One cannot overestimate how much this mattered to workingmen', Patrick Joyce explains, 'as more widely in English culture, history and a sense of English tradition was learned through literature. The figures that mattered most seem to

[48]Sixth Report of the Commissioners of the Fine Arts, 1846, 8.
[49]Gorak, 'Canons and canon formation,' 577.
[50]Langham, 'John Rogers Herbert,' 53.
[51]Qtd. Ibid., 53.

Figure 3. King Lear Disinheriting Cordelia, Fresco painting by John Rogers Herbert © UK Parliament, WOA 2884 heritagecollections.parliament.uk.

have been the English romantics, and Burns, Shakespeare and Milton', as well as the 'feeling' power of Byron.[52] The general permeation of this literary tradition

[52]Joyce, *Visions*, 178.

was most widespread through Shakespeare, whose canonical status beyond schoolrooms and beyond narrowly 'literary' or theatrical relevance 'became part of everyday life' via periodical publications from the early nineteenth century onwards.[53] In these widely-circulated texts, 'Shakespeare is interpreted anew in light of topical concerns like women's rights or of elements that would belong to the shared experience of common readers': 'again and again, in magazines for children, for women, for the working classes, readers are invited to consider what Shakespeare might mean to them on an acutely personal level'.[54] As Shakespeare and fellow poets became part of a shared cultural language across classes, they entered here into a new position in public life – both figuratively and literally. Members of the public did and still do pass through Upper Waiting on their way Committee Corridor to give input, evidence, and opinion. These frescoes were therefore positioned to be viewed not only by members or (as *Punch* imagined) by Queen Victoria, but by anyone visiting Parliament.

Lear may seem a 'curious choice',[55] but it must have had some contemporary resonances for Herbert. The early nineteenth century began to reinstate elements of 'Shakespeare's version' of the play from Nahum Tate's happy-ending rewriting (and classicised structure), which proved so enduringly popular. William Charles Macready restored the much of the pre-Tate text in in an 1833 production in Covent Garden and again in 1838 (in a much celebrated performance).[56] Herbert's own composition closely resembles what we might see as 'blocking' from Henry Fuseli's rendering of the same scene for Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery (but with Cordelia stage left). Richard Earlom's engraving of Fuseli's work was reissued just two years after the completion of Herbert's fresco. Although Fuseli's is, according to Langham, more 'stage-like' and Herbert's rather 'more restrained',[57] they both offer a stage-like proscenium view of the opening scene. Herbert's vivid colours also match the spectacular turn that attended productions of the play like Macready's and, twelve years later, Charles Kean's. Shakespearean theatrics in these years leant on 'skilful scene-painting and, in the better theatres, an imaginative use of gaslight and limelight', leaving the 'actor or singer […] part of a three-dimensional pictorial composition'.[58] Herbert's rich colours and vividly realised throne channel such theatricality to create a meticulously detailed but quietly moody tableau (in a manner that prefigures certain pre-Raphaelite renderings of Shakespearean characters, such as Holman Hunt's *Valentine Rescuing Silvia* [1851], with its similar triangular blocking).

[53]Prince, *Shakespeare in the Victorian Periodicals*, 3.
[54]Ibid., 8–9.
[55]Langham, 'John Rogers Herbert (1810-90),' 53.
[56]Halio, '*King Lear*,' 1564–65.
[57]Langham, 'John Rogers Herbert (1810-90),' 54.
[58]Booth, 'Macbeth,' 40.

Lear fits neatly into a series of frescoes that both emerge from and re-dramatise poetic events of symbolic nation-building. Lear's newly tripartite kingdom extends this representation to the different regions of a United Kingdom. Yet, like Maclise's *Justice*, it also threatens to undermine national triumphalism – especially given that Shakespeare's tragic ending had recently returned to the stage and at only a short distance from the reign of the 'mad' King George III – with an unsubtle warning about the dangers of a fractured polity.

Indeed, Poets' Hall was commissioned and completed during a decade when such visual and textual manifestations of English literary greatness were employed as colonial tools. Shakespeare was enlisted in a concerted empire-building project from the 1840s, with a series of editions produced for Indian readers. These were predicated on the notion that colonial subjects needed more help understanding Shakespeare's language than British readers, who were assumed to be 'inherently' attuned.[59] These heavily annotated texts made 'colonial India […] a laboratory for the building and testing of the modern Shakespeare edition' and were themselves sold widely in England.[60] Unlike the illustrated Shakespeares, with their concern for historical context, these editions emphasised the universal moral relevance of the works.[61] Jyotsna Singh begins her exploration of colonial Indian Shakespeares with the Calcutta Theatres, where a 'love of the theatre, and of Shakespeare, developed, first among the English community, and later, among its Indian emulators' from the building of the first theatre in 1775 onwards. Singh demonstrates how 'colonial administrators found an ally in English literature to support them in maintaining control over the natives under the guise of liberal education'[62] – a project espoused by the Whig historian Charles Macaulay, who was himself an influential figure on the Fine Arts Commission from 1844.[63] Yet, in the years of the Palace's reconstruction, Bengali theatres in Calcutta expressed both 'admiration and ambivalence' towards Shakespeare; by the second half of the nineteenth century, English language productions and theatrical models had largely declined (even if Shakespearean influence on Bengali theatre remained 'irrefutable').[64] *King Lear* in the Upper Waiting Hall, then, looks out not only at a passing Queen Victoria (made 'Empress of India' in 1877) or at committee members and guests but to subjects further afield.

Shakespeare's growing presence across all areas of Victorian public life is monumentalised by Herbert's fresco in the seat of ultimate institutional power. That public presence, however, was diffused via periodicals and burgeoning and heterodox working-class appropriations (not least in support of radical ends that ran somewhat counter to the celebration of monarchy

[59]Marcus, *How Shakespeare Became Colonial*, 22–3.
[60]Ibid., 23.
[61]See Marcus, chapter 6.
[62]Singh, 'Different Shakespeares,' 449.
[63]Boase, 'The Decoration of the New Palace,' 334.
[64]Singh, 'Different Shakespeares,' 452.

and parliamentary process supported by the Fine Arts Commission).[65] Public Shakespeares also drew strength from colonial editorial projects (which proved equally appealing to mass readerships in Britain, too) that sought, however precariously, to impose a singular cultural hegemony. As the defining moment in a play about a fractured kingdom, we might read retrospectively into Herbert's Lear signs of a galvanising English literary tradition that remained precarious across both domestic and imperial regions.

Allusion: The Building of Britain

The activities of the Fine Arts Commission may have faded after Prince Albert's death in 1861, but that did not mark an end to the Palace's wall painting schemes with narrative histories. Various Palace decoration took place throughout the remainder of the century, but the 1900s to 1920s saw a revival of the Commission's hopes for key corridor spaces left as then incomplete. Schemes in East Corridor (1910) and St Stephen's Hall (1927) sit either side of renewed activity around Shakespeare, his representations, and his representativeness – not least in the lead up to and aftermath of WW1, when the playwright helped galvanise a sense of belonging to a defined national community.[66] Such concerns, for the purposes here, rest on both an inward and outward looking identity: more than ever, as recent studies have shown, 'Elizabethanism' and bardolatry became intertwined in the service of remembering a unified and bucolic British past[67]; at the same time, Shakespeare's image served to shore up the sense of Britain as an imperial power. At the tercentenary of his death in 1916, Shakespeare enjoyed one of 'highest points of popularity, being celebrated as global bard and a national hero'.[68] The resulting Tudor narratives in the palace serve further to define Britishness at home and abroad in a related manner.

Like their Victorian predecessors, the artists in East Corridor and St Stephen's were tasked with representing historical moments of royal and parliamentary significance. In the words of one commissioning Speaker, such images 'tell the story of our national liberties on the spot where they were, for the most part, gained'.[69] Shakespeare appears explicitly once more in Henry Albert Payne's 'Plucking the Red and White Roses in the Old Temple Gardens' (WOA 2593; 1910), drawn from *1 Henry VI*. It forms part of a scheme of 6 paintings in the busy East Corridor at the heart of the Palace commissioned in 1908 and undertaken in a distinct 'post–pre-Raphaelite' style (overseen by the well-known painter Frank Abbey). Payne's scene serves to

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[65]See the many different engagements with Shakespeare charted by Murphy in *Shakespeare for the People*.
[66]Smialkowskia, 'Introduction.'
[67]See Grant Ferguson, *The Shakespeare Hut*.
[68]Calvo, 'Brought up to Date,' 276.
[69]HC/LB/1/106, 36.

represent the period of civil turbulence before the perceived flourishing of the sixteenth century (celebrated here via Erasmus and Thomas More). Payne's mural follows Cope's in the House of Lords in translating Shakespearean fiction to royal history. 'Know us by these colours for your foes' (2.4.105), says the Duke of Somerset, as in the painting he holds forth a red rose towards the Duke of Gloucester. The friction of this scene, emblematic of the War of the Roses, becomes a twentieth-century recasting of sixteenth-century propaganda – the Tudors as the uniting red-and-white rose, a motif Pugin placed on the many items of furniture and wood-carving through the Palace (as can be seen in Figure 1). Here, then, we have the clearest alignment in the Palace of Shakespeareanism and Tudorism.

The subsequent Shakespearean qualities of the Palace's Tudor subjects are visible again just upstairs in Solomon J. Solomon's depiction of the Commons petitioning Queen Elizabeth I to marry (WOA 2928, 1911), 'practically add[ing] to Britain's unwritten constitution [the] rhetorical self-imaging' of Elizabeth 'as wife and mother to her nation'.[70] The mural leads visitors towards the literary salon of Upper Waiting, itself featuring two poets closely associated with the Queen (in Spenser and Shakespeare). If followed on the route through East Corridor, past Payne's Duke of Somerset, then Solomon's remarkably gestural composition doubly emphasises how commissioners and artists understood sixteenth-century drama to convey and in turn to influence depictions of Tudor parliamentary and royal subjects more generally.

Elizabeth I's highly theatrical presence in the Palace continued to expand in the decades after Victoria's death. Another likeness appeared in one of the most visited spaces in the estate, St Stephen's Hall – the former chapel that housed the House of Commons until the fire of 1834. A third and ultimately successful attempt to decorate the hall was orchestrated by the Speaker of the House, John Henry Whitley, in 1924 (unveiled in 1927). He brought together, like his Victorian predecessors, a committee of artistic and historical experts. The theme was to be 'The Building of Britain', with a stricture of 'no realism' and a requirement to appeal to the voter in the street rather than the elite (in line with the extension of the franchise in 1918).[71] Whitley wanted them to be 'direct, so that he who runs may read'.[72] They were also to have educational ends, tutoring viewers in the growth of the nation up to 1707's Act of Union.

Among the final paintings are two of relevance to this discussion of Shakespearean presence in the Palace: Alfred Kingsley Lawrence's *Queen Elizabeth Commissions Raleigh to Sail for America, 1584* (WOA 2597) and William Rothenstein's *Sir Thomas Roe in the Court of Ajmir, 1614* (2598). The subject matter for the final eight paintings was negotiated between artists as well as

[70]Dobson and Watson, *England's Elizabeth*, 156–7.
[71]See Willesdon, *Mural Painting in Britain*, 132.
[72]HC/LB/1/106, Draft Paper.

Cameron, ultimately signed off by the Speaker.[73] Cameron was clear that he wanted 'an ordered sequence of events, though not necessarily connected with Parliament or the Palace of Westminster' and urged the Speaker to 'humour the painters – they do not like being told to illustrate a particular scene – they prefer to have a great subject-matter which they would interpret through some particular incident in our history'.[74] In honouring 'the freedom and individuality of the painter', Cameron successfully encouraged an array of different styles across the eight artworks, each of which have a distinct personality, approach, and tone. The Speaker also gave a steer to work in consultation with Sir Henry Newbolt, a poet and history writer, 'who may wish to seek the advice of one or two eminent historians'.[75] While these two paintings are not direct expressions of Shakespeare's canon, their theatrical qualities combine with a cultural association in the 1910s and 1920s, alluded to above, between the Elizabethan and the Shakespearean.

Setting the historical accuracy and background for these paintings aside,[76] the two scenes sought to demonstrate what Lord Crawford described in a letter to Cameron as 'the whole development and progress of our race', with Lawrence and Rothenstein having the broad category of 'overseas'.[77] The language bespeaks the colonial framing of the project and its celebration of incipient imperialism. Indeed, Lawrence's in-built caption summarises the purpose of these scenes. His full title reads: 'Queen Elizabeth the Faerie Queen of her Knights and Merchant Venturers commissions Sir Walter Raleigh to sail for America and discover new countries, 1584'. The caption recalls the cartoon of the Prosperous from the 1843 competition, captioned with *Julius Caesar*: 'There is a tide in the affairs of men / Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune' (4.3.219–20). Both artists identify and celebrate colonial expansionism within the early modern literary imagination.

Indeed, Lawrence's language draws on the rhetorical strategies of Elizabethan poets – most notably Edmund Spenser, whose *Faerie Queen* is itself illustrated just a few rooms away. Recent important interventions on Spenser have observed his investment 'in the use of poetry as a vehicle for the transmission of political ideas. His politics were deeply embedded in the English colonial project, and […] 'the politics and economics that ultimately produced settler colonialism, chattel slavery, the forced migration of peoples, and the development of the British empire animate … [such] early English texts'.[78] Spenser's epic poem depends on images and metaphors of whiteness, often equated with purity and in turn with the true church and with Elizabeth I

[73]See the correspondence at HC/LB/1/106.
[74]Letter of 29th June 1925, HC/LB/1/106, 34.
[75]Ibid.
[76]The embedded caption for Rothenstein's mis-dates the arrival of Roe as 1614; he arrived in 1616. For a wider account of Roe's visit, see: Nandini Das, *Courting India*; Chida-Razvi, 'The Perception of Reception.'.
[77]Cameron, letter dated 29th June 1925, HC/LB/1/106, 34.
[78]Britton and Coles, 'Spenser and Race.'

herself. These elements align with Lawrence's wider use of Renaissance allusions, both textual and visual; emphatic perspective lines in the painting's tiling recall Italian early Renaissance art (in particular, his inspiration, Piero della Francesca) and Dover's architecture is artificially Tudorised, while the caption's deliberate archaisms nod to foundational writing in English literature that lay at the heart of national self-conception: Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton. These too feed into the colonial narratives of the painting's both contemporary and historic contexts.

After all, Tudor aesthetics and subjects enjoyed a renewed aesthetic vigour in Britain during the first thirty years of the twentieth century in connection with imperial pride.[79] Jonathan Woodham has demonstrated how the Ruskinian and Arts and Crafts veneration of a pre-industrial age and approach met with 'a much more long-standing historical legacy of imperial significance'.[80] In the years surrounding the Building of Britain commission, mock Tudor housing became especially popular and featured in two decades' worth of Ideal Homes Exhibitions from 1908, notably including a Tudor village reconstruction in 1910 and displayed prominently in 1927s 'Village of New Ideas' (contemporaneous with the unveiling of the St Stephen's Hall scheme). Moreover, further visual representations of the period featured prominently at an Earl's Court exhibition in 1912 on 'Shakespeare's England' and in the unveiling of the new Wembley Stadium in 1924, three years before the murals were finished – in a 'Pageant of Empire' directed by Frank Lascelles with scenery by Frank Brangwyn.[81] (Brangwyn himself drew plans for a heraldry-inspired stained-glass window in the Palace's Royal Gallery the following year, WOA 7204, and fully designed a similar empire-inspired scheme for the Gallery rejected by the Commission and now in Swansea Guildhall). Each of these manifestations promoted empire as a central element of national identity. The aesthetic influences of Tudor style and a nationalist narrative of empire come together in St Stephen's Hall in the paintings of the Raleigh commission and Roe at the court of Ajmer. The themes of these works – and their mixture of modernist and Renaissance styles – speak precisely to the anxieties and insecurities of the 1920s.

This renewed Elizabethanism drew, as with model exhibitions like that at Earl's Court, on Shakespearean cultural capital. Elizabeth (and the Tudor era generally) was persistently associated with the playwright. Dobson and Watson explain how, 'the two find themselves posthumously embarked on a narrative trajectory' in which (via various questionable fictions and imaginings, from romantic to authorial couplings) 'they may be celebrated together as

[79]For an overview, see Calvo and Kahn's *Celebrating Shakespeare* and footnotes above.
[80]Woodham, 'Twentieth-Century Tudor Design,' 132. See also Empire Marketing Board posters with Tudor themes.
[81]Ibid.

figurative mother and father of the national culture'.[82] The theatricality of Lawrence's and Rothenstein's paintings draw on this link. Lawrence was passionate about acting and theatre – in particular about Shakespeare.[83] His work makes allusion to dramatic postures and stage blocking in a way that recalls Herbert's *Lear*. Moreover, Lawrence himself understood this work as a theatrical endeavour. He told Cameron that he saw the canvas as 'a flat stage (as it were) in which we place our characters' – part of a negotiation about the height and viewing point of his canvas and Rothenstein's on his right.[84] His telling metaphor emphasises the pageant-like nature of Tudor depictions throughout the Palace in the vein of Solomon's performative Elizabeth.

The 1910s and 1920s also saw the development of the so-called New Bibliography, which sought to rescue Shakespeare's earlier texts (especially the First Folio of 1623) from the scorn of nineteenth-century editors. Just two years before the Building of Britain scheme got underway, Alfred W. Pollard declared during the Annual Shakespeare Lecture that the printers of his early texts had a 'foundational role in the worldwide expansion of Shakespeare's reputation', noting that their work was

> good enough to allow Shakespeare to become the most famous of Englishmen, and the delight of men and women all over the world. Surely these men builded better than they knew.[85]

The echo in the title of the 'Building of Britain' scheme suggests a parallel project: one that ties together the visual representation of British history and the ongoing construction of the literary canon. In turn, the bibliographical project around the Folio – which, as Leah S. Marcus acknowledges, still impacts editorial practice today – links 'erecting the mighty edifice of Shakespeare with the building of the British empire'.[86] Just as published illustrated Shakespeares and Indian editions formed a backdrop to the mid-nineteenth-century aesthetics of the Palace, so editorial vocabulary and ideology came to be echoed in the visual projects of the 1920s. Shakespeare, in other words, continued to link contemporary concerns with a developing historical imaginary. Elizabethan and Stuart representation in the 'Building of Britain' scheme alludes to the period's literary and theatrical culture through what Lawrence sees as their 'stage'-like composition and their built-in captions; these Tudor-esque 'overseas' subjects in turn evoke renewed associations (from textual editing to architecture) between Shakespeare and empire-'building'.

[82]Dobson and Watson, *England's Elizabeth*, 133.
[83]Hutchison, 'Alfred Kingsley Lawrence,' n.p.
[84]Letter of 4 July 1925, HC/LB/1/106.
[85]Qtd. Marcus, *How Shakespeare Became Colonial*, 8.
[86]Ibid. See her reading of the links between the 'colonial language' of empire and the vocabulary of textual exploration and assessment.

Conclusion

Shakespeare is deeply present within the New Palace of Westminster, joining together aesthetics, subject matter, and a particular national imaginary. I have explored in this article his presence in the UK's Houses of Parliament by considering direct models for its artistic schemes, the style and influences of its artists, and the language and aims of its commissions. Such an endeavour points us towards a reception history of Shakespeare beyond text or theatre at a crucial point in debates about national aesthetic style. It also indicates the extent to which literary, theatrical, and editorial practice informed artistic expression in other media – notably during 80 years in which both reading and performance became more widespread than ever as non-elite pastimes, popular political tools, and imperial instruments. Indeed, the Palace can be read as a visual parallel to nineteenth- and early twentieth-century canon formation across history, theatre, and literature. Shakespeare in turn had a new role in public life; his appropriation in everything from history writing to housebuilding put the playwright at the centre of Eastlake's questionable and impossible project of discovering 'proper […] national taste'. More broadly, Shakespeare's oblique but discernible place in the narrative of the Tudoresque Palace indicates how the verbal and visual arts extended, and still extend, to the 'galleries' of power and the theatre of state.

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