



# The Painted Word: British History Painting, 1750-1830

*Peter Cannon-Brookes*

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In the latter half of the 18th century, history painting ranked at the top of the hierarchy of genres which governed the theory of art in England. Hence portrait painters like Reynolds would base their portraits on the great models of antiquity, and landscape painters such as Wilson and Turner embellished their views with classical or historical subjects. This marked admiration for the Italian grand manner, fostered by the grand tour, gave way to the development of new, British, subjects, as a result of increasing prosperity coupled with military and naval victories around the world. London became the international centre of printmaking and print-selling (a position maintained until the outbreak of the Napoleonic Wars); Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery and Macklin's English History Gallery were established; and large numbers of history paintings were commissioned from figurative painters such as Reynolds, West, Northcote, Fuseli and Romney - serving as models for prints which became better known than the originals. This catalogue illustrates the interdependence of paintings, drawings and prints of the period, and in so doing, seeks to make a contribution to a better understanding of a relatively neglected area of British art.

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