

**The ‘Ingenious Moral Painter’:  
Edward Penny, the Royal Academy  
and the Reinvention of Genre Painting  
1768-1782**

Two Volumes

**VOLUME ONE**

Text

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## ABSTRACT

Edward Penny (1714–1791) was the Royal Academy’s founding Professor of Painting and a frequent participant in the public art exhibitions that transformed London’s art world after 1760. Although Penny’s work has traditionally been dismissed as ‘tame’ and sentimental, recent scholarship now suggests that his mid-1760s exhibition paintings should be recognised as a highly significant attempt to apply the themes and concerns of historical art to accessible, contemporary subject matter. This thesis builds on these reinterpretations, but focuses on the still almost wholly neglected works from Penny’s Academy professorship (1768-83). Habitually dismissed as of marginal importance in comparison with the ‘grand manner’ portraits and history paintings for which the Academy is best known, these works are shown here to be among the most important and influential products of Penny’s long exhibition career. Using carefully contextualised close readings, each chapter takes a coherent phase of Penny’s career as an Academy exhibitor. The first two chapters show how the artist at first struggled to find a form of art that would be sufficiently dignified to conform to the Academy’s lofty artistic aims without forsaking the accessible, distinctly ‘British’ subject matter he favoured. The remaining chapters show how Penny finally succeeded in solving this problem by using scenes from everyday life to convey elevated moral messages. These ‘sermons in paint’ made such humble themes acceptable to the Academy, providing the inspiration for an enduring tradition of Academic ‘genre’ painting, pursued at first by William Redmore Bigg and George Morland, and then, more famously, by such figures as David Wilkie and William Mulready. Penny thus emerges not only as the foremost proponent of a previously unrecognised counter-classical idiom at the heart of the early Royal Academy, but as a critically influential figure in the development of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British art.

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## AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the material presented in this thesis is my own original work and that no part of it has been published or submitted for publication.

## INTRODUCTION

### ‘PLEASURE, PROFIT, FAME’

With the foundation in 1768 of the Royal Academy, the first truly public institution in British history exclusively dedicated to the promotion of the fine arts, it must have seemed that Edward Penny’s position as one of the finest British painters of his generation was both affirmed and assured. Not only was he one of the forty artists selected for membership of this highly exclusive institution, but he was also to become one of the committee of eight members in charge of directing the institution’s affairs; one of the five members appointed to the hanging committee for the Academy’s annual exhibition; and, perhaps most significantly, the institution’s Professor of Painting, one of four professors elected by the Academicians to guide the students who would be admitted to the Academy’s new schools.<sup>1</sup> The duties of this highly prestigious position, which included giving a series of annual lectures on ‘the Beauties and Imperfections of celebrated Works of Art’ as well as guiding the views, tastes and mode of study of the students, gave Penny a centrally important role in the Academy’s didactic functions.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, while the artist was nominally the equal of his fellow professors of anatomy, architecture and perspective, there can be little doubt that, in an institution that existed primarily to school future painters, he would have had the greatest influence. In this sense, it can reasonably be claimed that Penny was the third most important of the Academy’s permanent officers after the President, Sir Joshua Reynolds, and the Treasurer, Sir William Chambers.

Penny’s considerable reputation in his own time was built both on his solid practice as a portraitist, but more particularly on the series of works he had submitted to the new exhibitions that, since 1760, had been reshaping public perceptions of British art. Drawing his subjects from literature and drama, recent military events, and medieval history, Penny produced some of the most popular paintings of his time. Such was the market demand for his exhibition works that the majority were

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<sup>1</sup> For Penny’s appointment to these positions, see Charles Saumarez Smith, *The Company of Artists: The Origins of the Royal Academy of Arts in London* (London, 2012), pp. 96, 110, 122.

<sup>2</sup> A comprehensive description of the Professor of Painting’s role and duties was given in the Academy’s Instrument of Foundation, which is reproduced in full in Sidney C. Hutchinson, *The History of the Royal Academy, 1768-1968* (London, 1968), pp. 211-12 and is discussed further in Chapter 1 below, p. 52.

reproduced as high quality mezzotints by leading engravers such as Richard Houston, Valentine Green and William Sedgwick, while an even broader market of humbler purchasers was catered for by the many cheaper – often pirated – prints that were sold through the popular print warehouses of entrepreneurs like Carrington Bowles.<sup>3</sup> Characteristically presenting scenes of benevolent and virtuous actions, Penny's most acclaimed images were hailed by critics and commentators for their 'ingenuity' and 'morality'. James Barry, who was elected to the Professorship of Painting after Penny's retirement in 1783, even claimed that these qualities rendered him superior to Britain's most celebrated native artist, William Hogarth:

Hogarth has often been imitated in his satirical vein, sometimes in his humorous; but very few have attempted to rival him in his moral walk. The line of art pursued by my very ingenious predecessor and brother Academician, Mr Penny, is quite distinct from that of Hogarth, and is of a much more delicate and superior relish; he attempts the heart and reaches it whilst Hogarth's general aim is only to shake the sides: in other respects, no comparison can be thought of, as Mr Penny has all that knowledge of the figure and academical skill, which the other wanted.<sup>4</sup>

Penny, then, in Barry's eyes, was a highly learned and 'ingenious' painter whose work displayed a level of technical, intellectual and emotional refinement alien to Hogarth's coarser and more overtly comic style.

Within a few years of Penny's death in 1791, however, the very qualities that commended his paintings to his contemporaries had come to be seen as their greatest weakness. In his classic 'Essay on the Genius and Character of Hogarth', first published in 1811, the celebrated essayist Charles Lamb again compared the artistic achievement of Hogarth with that of Penny, but this time much to the detriment of the latter. Contrasting the clear and touching moral purposes of Penny's images with Hogarth's more sardonic works, he stated that Penny's paintings no doubt show 'very amiable subjects, pretty things to teach the first rudiments of humanity... But, good God! is this *milk for babes* to be set up in opposition to Hogarth's moral

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<sup>3</sup> Penny is said to have made £500 from Sayer's edition of *The Death of General Wolfe*. See Edward Edwards, *Anecdotes of Painters Who Have Resided or Been Born in England; With Critical Remarks on Their Productions* (London, 1808), p. 180.

<sup>4</sup> James Barry, *An Account of a Series of Pictures in the Great Room of the Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce at the Adelphi* (London, 1783), pp. 164-65.

scenes, his *strong meat for men?*<sup>5</sup> Lamb's criticism set the tone for almost all subsequent writing on Penny and, by the time the Redgrave brothers wrote their classic *A Century of British Painters* in 1866, the artist's reputation had reached such a nadir that he received only a single incidental mention, as a 'painter of male portraits and pictures of sentiment'.<sup>6</sup>

With a single conspicuous exception, more recent historians of British art have done little to rethink this view. Edgar Wind, one of the German *émigré* scholars who introduced modern art historical methods to the study of British art, omitted to mention Penny in his celebrated paper on the introduction of contemporary costume into late eighteenth-century British Academic history painting. This 'Revolution in History Painting' was a significant development, as it contradicted the traditional principle that history painting, as the most elevated in the 'hierarchy of genres', should be as remote as possible from everyday life. In seeking to account for the increasing acceptability of historical works depicting contemporary subjects, Wind focused entirely on Benjamin West's *Death of General Wolfe*, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1771.<sup>7</sup> He therefore implicitly portrayed it as the first work of its kind, even though Penny had submitted a similarly contemporary depiction of the same scene to the exhibition of the Society of Artists as early as 1764. Penny's place in this 'revolution' therefore remained unacknowledged and unaccounted for. Charles Mitchell did, somewhat tentatively, point out the omission, suggesting that West's work was part of a longer tradition and that Penny's example, though unsuccessful in its own right, offered an important model for West.<sup>8</sup> Wind's crushing retort was that Penny was merely '...one of those minor artists who have the misfortune to be periodically disinterred, apparently for no other purpose than to diminish the lustre of a brighter name'.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Lamb, 'Essay on the Genius and Character of Hogarth', in E. V. Lucas (ed.), *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb* (7 vols) (London, 1903-1905), vol. 1, *Miscellaneous Prose 1798-1834*, pp. 81-82.

<sup>6</sup> Richard and Samuel Redgrave, *A Century of British Painters* (1866; 1890; London, 1947), p. 41.

<sup>7</sup> Edgar Wind, 'The Revolution of History Painting', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1938): 116-27.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Mitchell, 'Benjamin West's "Death of General Wolfe" and the Popular History Piece', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 7 (1944): 20-33.

<sup>9</sup> Edgar Wind, 'Penny, West, and the Death of General Wolfe', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 10 (1947): 162-65, as reprinted in Edgar Wind, *Hume and the Heroic Portrait: Studies in Eighteenth-Century Imagery* (Jaynie Anderson (ed.)) (Oxford, 1986), pp. 100-104.

Such views have set the pattern for more recent scholarship. According to Ellis Waterhouse, the author of what remains the standard introductory work on early modern British painting, ‘Penny’s work would be important if it had any effect’; instead it was ‘very tame indeed’.<sup>10</sup> Although Waterhouse does briefly outline the artist’s biography, the only work to receive any attention in his account is *The Death of General Wolfe*, which he (in this case mistakenly) cites as the first representation of this subject. Joseph Burke too, in his general study of eighteenth-century English art, restricts his attention to this work, which is cited in a few lines.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Penny has received barely more than a mention in other standard works: Robert Rosenblum briefly references two of his works, *Widow Costard’s Cow and Goods Distraigned for Taxes, are Redeemed by the Generosity of Johnny Pearmain* (exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1782) and the artist’s earlier *The Generous Behaviour of the Chevalier Baiard* (exhibited at the Society of Artists in 1768), but only as exemplifications of the theme of charity in late eighteenth-century European art rather than as achievements in their own right.<sup>12</sup> Even more strikingly, Holger Hock, in his recent account of the Royal Academy, which as an institutional history might be expected to give more prominence to an artist who evidently played a crucial role in the Academy’s foundation, refers to Penny just once and even then only in passing.<sup>13</sup>

This thesis is motivated by the conviction that the time is ripe to fundamentally rethink this pattern of neglect. Even Waterhouse conceded that Penny ‘may yet turn out to deserve more of our notice’.<sup>14</sup> If this was true in 1953 it is surely even more so now: in the last twenty years, largely as a result of the researches of David Solkin and a number of his pupils, we have come to appreciate anew the enormity of the transformation in Britain’s artistic life that took place over the course of the eighteenth century and Penny’s place within it. In his article ‘Portraiture in Motion: Edward Penny’s “Marquis of Granby” and the Creation of a Public for English Art’, Solkin argues that Penny’s *The Marquis of Granby Relieving a Sick Soldier* from 1765 represents an important attempt to reconfigure traditional historical painting in

<sup>10</sup> Ellis Waterhouse, *Painting in Britain 1530-1790* (1953; London, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., 1978), pp. 283-84.

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Burke, *English Art 1714-1800* (Oxford, 1976), p. 246.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Rosenblum, *Transformations in Late Eighteenth-Century Art* (1967; Princeton, 1974), p. 59.

<sup>13</sup> The only occurrence of Penny’s name is in a footnote naming the Directors who resigned from the Committee of the Society of Artists in 1768: Holger Hock, *The King’s Artists: The Royal Academy of Arts and the Politics of British Culture 1760-1840* (Oxford, 2003), p. 20, fn. 7.

<sup>14</sup> Waterhouse, *Painting in Britain*, p. 284.

a way intended to make it more accessible to contemporary viewers.<sup>15</sup> Solkin's claims have since been restated and extended in his broader study of the development of eighteenth-century British art, *Painting for Money: The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century England*, in which he traces the successive attempts by London's artistic community to create a public able to appreciate and patronise their works.<sup>16</sup> In doing so, he shows how the exclusive and aristocratic conception of art that was dominant in the early eighteenth century was gradually eroded by a more open and inclusive model better suited to England's burgeoning capitalist economy. In Solkin's account, Penny emerges as a seminal figure in this process, not only for his *Marquis of Granby* but also for his *The Death of General Wolfe*, both of which can be seen as representatives of a new and highly innovative form of art aimed at the unprecedentedly broad audiences that attended the new public exhibitions of the period.<sup>17</sup> Penny's significance has been further affirmed by Matthew Hargraves in his comprehensive and illuminating history of the Society of Artists of Great Britain, where the artist is cited repeatedly both as an artistic innovator and as a central figure within the Society.<sup>18</sup> Penny's central importance in the establishment of the Royal Academy also emerges clearly from Charles Saumarez Smith's recent account of the foundation of the Royal Academy.<sup>19</sup> These new developments in our understanding of Penny's early career are highly suggestive, but they have not led to a more comprehensive engagement with his output as the Academy's Professor of Painting. It is my intention here to focus on this most neglected phase of the artist's career; but before going on to outline the key features of my interpretation I will first briefly discuss Penny's origins and rise to prominence as an exhibition artist, paying special attention to his works for the Society of Artists' exhibitions. With this background in place, I will go on to give a more detailed account of the recent historiography, and show how my research seeks both to develop and, in certain respects, rethink it.

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<sup>15</sup> David H. Solkin, 'Portraiture in Motion: Edward Penny's "Marquis of Granby" and the Creation of Public for English Art', *The Huntingdon Library Quarterly*, vol. 49, no. 1 (winter 1986): 1-23.

<sup>16</sup> David H. Solkin, *Painting for Money: The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven and London, 1992).

<sup>17</sup> Solkin, *Painting for Money*, chs. 5-7; for Penny, see esp. pp. 199-213.

<sup>18</sup> Matthew Hargraves, *Candidates for Fame: The Society of Artists of Great Britain 1760-1791* (New Haven and London, 2005), passim.

<sup>19</sup> Saumarez Smith, *The Company of Artists*, passim.

## I

On 1 August 1714 – the very day that the Hanoverian dynasty ascended to the English throne – Edward Penny was born in the prosperous provincial market town of Knutsford in Cheshire. There was little in his family background to suggest his future artistic fame. Coming from a long line of solid professional men, he might have been expected to follow his father into the medical profession, as his twin-brother Henry was to do, or to follow his uncle, great-uncle, grandfather, and great-grandfather to Oxford University and a Church living.<sup>20</sup> Instead, probably at the age of sixteen or seventeen, that is to say in around 1730 to 1732, he began an apprenticeship in the fashionable London studio of the eminent portraitist, Thomas Hudson.<sup>21</sup> The choice of Hudson was to prove an important one. To begin with, Penny was to learn his trade in one of the capital's most sophisticated and prolific portrait practices, known for its impressive full-length portraits of elite society figures. Here, he would have received a rigorous and extensive training in all the fundamentals of his future trade, including the grinding and mixing of colours, the preparation of canvases and, perhaps most crucially, proficient draughtsmanship. 'Disegno' was held to be the central accomplishment of the true artist and would have been developed through progressive mastery of the details of anatomy; the scrupulous copying of Old Master prints and drawings; drawing from casts and, finally, from the living model.<sup>22</sup> No less significantly, by entering Hudson's studio,

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<sup>20</sup> The professions of Penny's father and brother are recorded in the Penny family genealogy printed in Frederick Arthur Crisp (ed.), *Visitation of England and Wales* (35 vols) (London [privately printed], 1893-1921), Notes, vol. 11, pp. 135-40.

<sup>21</sup> Penny's apprenticeship to Hudson is attested to by Ellis Waterhouse, *The Dictionary of British Eighteenth-Century Painters* (Woodbridge, 1981), pp. 272-75 and Samuel Redgrave in his earlier biography of the artist in *A Dictionary of Artists of the English School: Painters, Sculptors, Architects, Engravers and Ornamentists* (London, 1878), p. 327. For Hudson's practice, see Ellen Miles, *Thomas Hudson 1701-1779: Portrait Painter and Collector, A Bicentenary Exhibition*, exh. cat. (London, Kenwood House, 1979). It seems likely that Penny would have begun his apprenticeship at this age, since it is known that Hudson's other pupils, Reynolds and Joseph Wright of Derby, did so.

<sup>22</sup> A valuable description of the traditional process of artistic learning can be found in the preface to Thomas Page's *The Art of Painting in its Rudiment, Progress and Perfection* (Norwich, 1720). Although the details of Penny's own apprenticeship are lost, the drawings produced by Wright of Derby during his apprenticeship confirm that Hudson's workshop training adhered closely to traditions of the Old Masters—see Jane Wallis, *Joseph Wright of Derby 1734-1797*, exh. cat. (Derby, Derby Museums and Art Gallery, 1997), esp. cat. nos. 12, *Various Studies of Eyes and Noses with Copies of Hudson's Signature*, and 20, *A Portrait of a Gentleman, After Peter Lely's Portrait of Prince Rupert, Duke of York*.

Penny was also joining an extensive and influential artistic network. In 1725, Hudson had taken over the former home and studio of his teacher and father-in-law, Jonathan Richardson, known as a pioneering art theorist and collector of Old Master drawings as well as a portrait painter in his own right. Hudson's fellow pupils included George Knapp, portrait painter to, and founding member of, the Society of Dilettante, an elite dining club for artists and aristocrats who had been to Italy. Through Richardson, the studio's artistic lineage stretched back to such prominent seventeenth-century painters as John Riley, Isaac Fuller and Gerard Soest.<sup>23</sup> Of equal importance, Hudson's other pupils would later include two of the most celebrated British artists of the eighteenth century, Joshua Reynolds and Joseph Wright of Derby. By joining Hudson's studio, then, Penny was gaining the best possible training available to an aspiring portrait painter as well as beginning to acquire the artistic contacts that would serve him well in future years.

It seems, however, that Penny's ambitions required more than a London apprenticeship, even in a studio as eminent as Hudson's. He would have been very aware that the education of an artist who sought to attain the first rank in his profession would not be complete until he had spent at least some time in Italy. There he could see the great works of the ancient and modern masters at first hand, acquire something of the technical sophistication for which Continental artists were renowned, and broaden his experience beyond commonplace portraiture to include more demanding historical and religious subjects. This awareness was clearly shared by the local Cheshire elites, who must have cherished ambitions for the talented young artist: in or about 1740, Penny 'was enabled to proceed to Rome to pursue his studies by the liberality of the neighbouring gentry, who subscribed a purse for that generous purpose'.<sup>24</sup>

During a prolonged Italian sojourn, Penny both continued his formal studies and further expanded his social and professional network. In Rome, the young artist entered the studio of the pioneering neo-classical painter Marco Benefial (1684-1764), providing valuable exposure to the fashionable aristocratic portraiture,

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<sup>23</sup> Riley had been tutored by Fuller and Soest: see J. Douglas Stewart's entry on John Riley in H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (eds), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (60 vols) (Oxford, 2004), hereafter referred to as ODNB.

<sup>24</sup> Henry Angelo's father had been a close friend of the artist: Henry Angelo, *Reminiscences of Henry Angelo, with Memoirs of His Late Father and Friends* (London, 1828), p. 121.

classifying history paintings, and large-scale religious works that dominated his new master's output.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, certain aspects of Benefial's approach seem to have left a permanent mark on Penny's practice, in particular the notably realistic style and concern for historical accuracy in costume and setting evident in such works as the *Visione de santa Caterina Fieschi* (fig. 1) from 1737. After completing his studies with Benefial, Penny proceeded to Florence. There he joined the circle of the renowned art historian and antiquary Francesco Gabburri, 'the resort', as Penny later recalled to George Vertue, 'of all the Virtuosi and Painters young and old of all countries'.<sup>26</sup> While in the city, he also undertook a full-scale copy of Van Dyck's renowned *Cardinal Guido Bentivoglio* in the Palazzo Pitti (fig. 2). This painting, which survives in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, is a striking demonstration of the artist's precocious technical accomplishment as well as his evident desire to develop a more fluid and painterly style than that practised in Hudson's atelier. Finally, Penny spent a prolonged period in Bologna, also a renowned artistic centre. Here, he acted on behalf of Horace Walpole in his attempts to procure a major Domenichino for his father's collection, in the process attracting the approbation of Walpole's advisor in Italy, Horace Mann.<sup>27</sup> After giving Penny 'ten zecchins for the trouble he has had', Mann told Walpole that 'Nobody could ever have managed the thing better than Mr Pennee has done'.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, by the time of his return to England in 1743, Penny had not only joined the small elite of British artists with Continental training, but had greatly enlarged his range of artistic contacts and furthered his reputation as a sober and reliable young man.<sup>29</sup> Upon these foundations he rapidly established a successful portrait business, first in his native Cheshire and then in London.<sup>30</sup> A notable example of one of Penny's provincial works survives from the period immediately postdating his

<sup>25</sup> See Waterhouse, *Painting in Britain*, p. 205.

<sup>26</sup> George Vertue, 'Notebooks', *Walpole Society*, vol. 22 (1933-34): 154-55.

<sup>27</sup> W. S. Lewis, Warren Hunting Smith and George L. Lam (eds), *Horace Walpole's Correspondence* (48 vols) (New Haven, 1937-1983), vol. 17, pp. 226-27, Horace Mann to Walpole, 17 December 1741. Mann's letter to Walpole is also cited in John Ingamells, *A Dictionary of British and Irish Travellers in Italy, 1701-1800* (New Haven and London, 1997), p. 756.

<sup>28</sup> Lewis, Smith and Lam, (eds), *Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, vol. 17, p. 228, Horace Mann to Walpole, 19 December 1741; and p. 267, Horace Mann to Walpole, 16 January 1742.

<sup>29</sup> For the date of Penny's return to England, see Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, Brinsley Ford Papers, boxes RBF/1/671 and RBF/3/15, quoting a letter from a Cheshire gentleman, Amos Meredith to Theophilus Hastings, Ninth Earl of Huntingdon, quoted from HMC Hastings, vol. 3 (London, 1934), p. 43.

<sup>30</sup> For Penny's northern practice, see Waterhouse, *Painting in Britain*, p. 205.

return. Penny's half-length portrait of the Liverpool merchant, William Farrington (fig. 3), from 1744 is a highly accomplished work that skilfully accommodates its sitter's social aspirations. Dressed in a simple but smart jacket and waistcoat, with a tricorne hat tucked under his left arm, Farrington, in spite of his youth and mercantile origins, is portrayed as the epitome of gentlemanly elegance.

By 1750 at the very latest, Penny had returned to London and taken up residence in Leicester Fields, which was both at the heart of London's artistic community and within easy reach of potential patrons in the city's wealthy West End.<sup>31</sup> An impressive representative of the more distinguished class of sitter that Penny was now able to attract is to be found in his three-quarter length portrait of *Lady Anne Whitmore* (fig. 4) from 1757. Penny's mastery of Hudson's style of representation is evident in the confident handling of this ambitious and somewhat formal portrait, which shows its sitter elaborately dressed in 'Van Dyck' costume and perched with self-conscious refinement on a handsomely carved and upholstered chair. Even more strikingly, the artist had also begun extending his practice beyond such highly competent but relatively conventional works to include numerous small whole-length portraits of considerable delicacy and sophistication. A good example is his portrait of the renowned actor David Garrick (fig. 5) from 1756. Showing Garrick as if disturbed in the midst of reading while sitting in his garden, this is a picture notable for its elegant informality and painterly finesse.

That Penny could with equal assurance produce such very different works serves to demonstrate the diversity of his practice as well as the range of his talents. His abilities soon secured recognition from his peers and, as early as 1748, he was ranked among the forty 'eminent painters' listed by Joshua Kirby in his essay on 'The Art of Painting' for the *Universal Magazine*.<sup>32</sup> By 1753, his status was such that Francis Milner Newton identified him as a potential officer for a new national academy of art that he proposed should be created out of the existing St. Martin's

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<sup>31</sup> For full details of the exact location of Penny's residence in Soho, see F. H. W. Sheppard (ed.), *The Survey of London: St. Anne, Soho* (London, 1966), vol. 34, p. 512. For Leicester Fields as a centre of artistic life, see Kit Wedd, with Lucy Peltz and Cathy Ross, *Artists' London: Holbein to Hirst*, exh. cat. (London, Museum of London, 2001), pp. 34-36. The location of artists' colourmen in this period is documented in Thomas Mortimer, *The Universal Director; or, The Nobleman and Gentleman's True Guide to the Masters and Professors of the Liberal and Polite Arts and Sciences* (London, 1763), p. 25.

<sup>32</sup> List appended to 'Pictor' [Joshua Kirby], 'The Art of Painting, Limning Etc., with a Curious Copper Plate', in *The Universal Magazine*, vol. 3 no. 5 (November 1748): 232.

Lane Academy, an informal drawing society that had been founded by Hogarth.<sup>33</sup> The prospectus lists all those putatively qualified by their skill and eminence for these prestigious posts and, although the scheme proved abortive, Penny's appearance confirms his central position in London's art world at a critical period of transition.

Penny's increasing worldly success is also confirmed by his changing personal circumstances. On 4 September 1755, he married one Elizabeth Simmons in St Anne's Church, Soho. It was a good match: Simmons was a thirty-six-year-old widow and a woman of property. As the daughter of a prominent carpenter and developer, as well as the widow of a successful bricklayer, she had inherited substantial life interests in the new West End estates that had become the favoured location for the residences of the aristocracy and gentry.<sup>34</sup> The financial security that came with Penny's marriage must have been considerable. It is no doubt this inheritance that eventually enabled Penny to take up residence in one of the Simmons properties in Grosvenor Square, then, as now, one of the most prestigious addresses in London.<sup>35</sup> In addition, it was presumably his new found prosperity that allowed him to portray himself in 1759 as an archetypal mid-Georgian gentleman (fig. 6). Elegantly attired in powdered wig – in the fashionable but dignified 'campaign' style – and sumptuous blue velvet frock coat, from which spills the elaborate lace-edges of his shirt and cravat, he gazes at the viewer with a self-assured and confident half-smile.<sup>36</sup> His hand, moreover, is tucked nonchalantly in his waistcoat, a conventional marker of gentility, while the tools of his trade are nowhere to be seen, his artistic identity wholly occluded by his social aspirations.

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<sup>33</sup> An apparently unique surviving letter outlining Milner's proposals with the printed list of 150 possible artists, survives at the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Folio A N 191. I am grateful to Matthew Hargraves for bringing this source to my attention.

<sup>34</sup> Simmons's husband, Richard Fortnam, had interests in at least nine properties on the Burlington Estate: see the Lease Tables published in F. H. W. Sheppard (ed.), *The Survey of London: St James, Westminster* (London, 1963), vols. 31 & 32, pt. 2, pp. 546-65. Simmons inherited these interests on the death of her husband in 1753, as recorded in his will dated 17 May 1753, National Archives, Prob 11/801/360. She further inherited a quarter-interest in the much larger estate of her mother, also Elizabeth, who had continued her husband's business until her own death in 1755; see her will dated 26 March 1755 and codicil of 30 May 1755, National Archives, Prob 11/817/73.

<sup>35</sup> Penny's address is recorded in the Academy exhibition catalogues as Duke Street, Grosvenor Square from 1776 to 1782; this was the east side of the square that had been developed, some fifty years earlier, by John Simmons. See *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy, MDCCLXXVI: The Eighth* (London, 1776), p. 20 and *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy, MDCCLXXXII: The Fourteenth* (London, 1782), not paginated.

<sup>36</sup> For the styles of wig fashionable in this period, see Janet Arnold, *Perukes & Periwigs*, exh. cat. (London, National Portrait Gallery, 1970), esp. pp. 19-20.

Such worldly success, however, had clearly not exhausted Penny's artistic ambitions. As early as 1748, he had demonstrated both the desire and the ability to undertake more complex work. Commissioned to decorate the east wall of the recently rebuilt Church of St. Peter, Congleton in his native Cheshire, he took as his subject the monumental figures of St. Peter and St. Paul, bringing an unexpected touch of Roman baroque grandeur to an otherwise conventional Palladian parish church.<sup>37</sup> A few years later, we find him collaborating with the celebrated Italian landscapist Francesco Zuccarelli on the design of a sumptuous suite of tapestries for Holkham Hall.<sup>38</sup> But it was not until the 1760s, with the advent of the public art exhibitions that transformed London's artistic life, that Penny's talents really found an appropriate showcase.

## II

Although he did not exhibit at the very first exhibitions of fine art that were held in 1760 and 1761, from 1762 onwards Penny regularly submitted works to the Society of Artists' exhibitions in Spring Gardens. No doubt aided by the financial security afforded by his marriage, Penny was able to prepare a series of exhibition submissions that attracted increasing public and critical acclaim. For his debut show in 1762, Penny submitted two works. The first, 'a small whole length of a lady', offered an example of his professional output as a portraitist. Alongside it, however, he exhibited his first known historical work, depicting Jane Shore (fig. 7), the eponymous protagonist of Nicholas Rowe's recent theatrical sensation *The Tragedy of Jane Shore*. Rowe's play recounts how Shore had abandoned her husband for the sake of an adulterous liaison with Edward IV, before incurring the enmity of Edward's successor to the throne, Richard III. Penny's image focused on one of the culminating scenes of the tragic storyline, in which Shore, having been forgiven by

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<sup>37</sup> Nikolaus Pevsner and Edward Hubbard, *The Buildings of England: Cheshire* (Harmondsworth, 1971), p. 182.

<sup>38</sup> Penny's involvement with Zuccarelli on this project is noted in Sheppard (ed.), *The Survey of London: St Anne, Soho*, vol. 34, Appendix 1, p. 519.

her long-suffering husband, is about to be seized by King Richard's guards.<sup>39</sup> The heroine is shown melodramatically sprawled across the ground with her husband kneeling in desperation by her side, the soldiers advancing towards them in the background. In spite of being produced on a modest scale – the painting measured only 24¼ by 29½ inches – the narrative and compositional sophistication of this image signalled a new level of ambition in Penny's practice, providing a striking counterpoint to the more conventional portrait alongside which it was hung. Pursuing a similar strategy for the following year's exhibition, Penny paired a small whole length portrait of George Edwards, the acclaimed author of *The Natural History of Birds*, with another narrative work (currently untraced) that depicted a scene from Torquato Tasso's highly-esteemed Renaissance drama *Aminta*.<sup>40</sup> The choice of Tasso as the subject for an exhibition painting is of particular interest, as it seemingly capitalised, like *Jane Shore* the year before, on the success of a celebrated literary work.<sup>41</sup> The specific scene chosen appears to have been carefully calculated to take advantage of this popularity: depicting the pivotal third act of Tasso's drama, when the shepherd Aminta rescues the nymph Sylvia from being raped by a lusty Satyr, it would have held instant escapist, not to mention erotic, appeal for contemporary viewers.<sup>42</sup>

Thus the exhibitions of 1762-63 marked a turning point in Penny's artistic career, definitively extending his practice beyond portraiture alone and towards the production of works based on historical and literary themes. Penny's new artistic identity was proudly affirmed in Thomas Mortimer's *Universal Director* in 1763, where he is listed as 'History and Portrait Painter'; and in the following years' exhibitions he submitted a series of still more ambitious works.<sup>43</sup> No longer

<sup>39</sup> Rowe's production was first staged at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane on 2 February 1714 and proved so popular that it was repeatedly performed over successive seasons throughout London's playhouses. For more information on the individual performances, especially those staged prior to the opening of the Society of Artists' show, see George Winchester Stone (ed.), *The London Stage, 1660-1800*, pt. 4: 1747-1776 (3 vols) (Carbondale, 1962), vol. 2, pp. 882-89.

<sup>40</sup>References to Tasso's drama appear in a wide range of London newspapers throughout the early 1760s, one notable example being a verse, entitled 'The Satyr's Imprecation in Tasso's *Aminta*, Imitated', published in the *Lloyd's Evening Post and British Chronicle*, 8 July 1761.

<sup>41</sup> The translations were by P. B. du Bois (1726), an anonymous writer (1731) and William Ayre [1737].

<sup>42</sup> As Penny's work was exhibited under the title 'A Scene from the *Aminta* of Tasso, Sylvia delivered from a Satyr by Amintor', we can be sure that he also depicted the pivotal third act of Tasso's drama. See item no. 90 in *A Catalogue of the Pictures...Exhibited by the Society of Artists of Great Britain at the Great Room, in Spring-Gardens, Charing-Cross, May the Fourteenth, 1763* (London, 1763), p. 7.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas Mortimer, *The Universal Director*, p. 22.

exhibiting portraits, he now focused entirely on subject paintings. For the fourth annual Society of Artists' show in 1764, Penny chose to exhibit an unusual 'conversation piece' – that is to say a small-scale group portrait – showing an event from recent military history, alongside a light-hearted genre scene.<sup>44</sup> The artist's first piece captured an especially poignant and highly-charged episode from the recent Seven Years' War: the tragic death of General James Wolfe at the instant of Britain's victory over France in Quebec in September 1759 (fig. 8). Corresponding closely to eye-witness accounts of Wolfe's death, the main figure group in this work consists of two officers in the uniform of the Louisbourg Grenadiers and a physician, along with Wolfe himself, who is slumped awkwardly on the ground, his skin visibly losing colour and his glazed eyes reflecting his state of extremity.<sup>45</sup> This was an image that sought to present Wolfe's final moments in as faithful and affecting a manner as possible. Penny's second exhibit, which depicted a scene from Jonathan Swift's highly popular satire *A Description of a City Shower* (fig. 9) from 1709, could hardly have been more different in mood and treatment. With a familiar though elegant city street forming the backdrop, this image portrayed – in line with Swift's comic narrative – a startled passer-by receiving an unexpected soaking at the hands of a mop-rolling maid.<sup>46</sup> The resulting contrast with Penny's more dignified portrayal of *The Death of General Wolfe* can only have been intentional and its effectiveness was evidently recognised by contemporaries. One critic lauded Penny as 'An ingenious painter', before observing that 'His Picture of Gen. Wolfe is truly pathetic, and the other entertaining. There is as sweet a simplicity in the Girl that whirls the Mop, as I ever saw in any Thing'.<sup>47</sup>

The success of this pictorial combination led Penny to repeat the formula for his exhibition submission of 1765, which again brought together a contemporary military subject with a more jocular scene. The first picture, *The Marquis of Granby*

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<sup>44</sup> On the classification of Penny's *The Death of General Wolfe* and his later *The Marquis of Granby Relieving a Sick Soldier* as conversation pieces, see Solkin, *Painting for Money*, pp. 200-202 and 293-94, fn. 97.

<sup>45</sup> Penny's depiction closely resembles the account given in John Knox, *Historical Journal of the Campaigns in North America for the Years 1757, 1758, 1759, and 1760* (2 vols) (London, 1769), vol. 2, p. 79.

<sup>46</sup> Penny's scene coheres with lines 19-22 of Swift's narrative: 'Such is that sprinkling which some careless quean/ Flirts on you with her mop, but not so clean/ You fly, invoke the gods; then turning, stop/ To rail; she singing, still whirls on her mop'. See Roger Lonsdale, *The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth-Century Verse* (Oxford, 1984), p. 16.

<sup>47</sup> *Public Advertiser*, 5 May 1764.

*Relieving a Sick Soldier* (fig. 10), took as its theme a benevolent action by one of the most celebrated generals of the Seven Years' War, John Manners, Marquis of Granby. Granby is shown mounted on his horse between two groups of figures, one consisting of a cluster of mounted officers and the other of the ailing soldier and his family. Having apparently stumbled upon the needy family, Granby is now relieving their suffering by presenting them with a gold coin. This touching episode, with its combination of narrative clarity, emotional appeal and familiar subject matter, once again proved successful with the public and critics alike. As one critic wrote,

The author followed with precision the soldier's surprise at the sight of his officer, he has shewn in his face some weakness caused by interior pains, he makes known also the wife's astonishment at the officer's generosity towards her small family, the child is in a most spiritual attitude; the public praises which those pieces deservedly merit, ought to flatter and encourage the author to continue in performances both new and agreeable.<sup>48</sup>

The second painting Penny exhibited that year, *The Return from a Fair* (fig. 11), portrayed the members of a fictive rural community returning home from a day spent at a local fair. Against the backdrop of an expansive, and typically 'English', rural landscape, we see two carefully delineated figures. The first is an attractive country girl, who, although apparently of modest social status, is dressed in her best clothes. Beside her, we see her bashful suitor, who is shown presenting her with a red ribbon inscribed with the word 'love', presumably bought at the fair as a token of his affections. Whilst the boy clasps the girl's arm, drawing her in towards him, she turns her head away to hide her blushing face. This scene of youthful love is, however, suddenly transformed into a knowing joke when our gaze settles on the background, where we see a drunken male with his hapless wife and noisy, drum-beating son. This, we are clearly being asked to imagine, is where the delights of courtship will ultimately lead. The resulting 'natural Scene, somewhat in the Manner

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<sup>48</sup> [I. N.], *A Critical Review of the Pictures, Sculptures, Designs in Architecture, Drawings, Prints Etc., Exhibited at the Great Room in Spring Gardens, Charing Cross* (London, 1765), pp. 8-9, also quoted in Solkin, 'Portraiture in Motion', p. 12.

of Hogarth' once again, therefore, functioned as a humorous foil to its more serious companion.<sup>49</sup>

Penny, it would seem, had rapidly become a skilled and effective operator within the new space of the exhibition room. Armed with both the critical and popular success brought by these carefully constructed sets of submissions, he soon began taking an increasingly important official role within the Society of Artists. In 1765, he was elected to the Society's vice-presidency at the same time that Francis Hayman became President.<sup>50</sup> Penny subsequently seems to have played a vital role in the Society's affairs, working closely with the Secretary, Francis Milner Newton on administrative and organisational matters.<sup>51</sup> Perhaps because of the pressure of Society business, he failed to exhibit at the 1766 exhibition, and returned to the exhibition room with only a single work in 1767. This piece took as its subject *The Husbandman's Return from Work* and, though now untraced, its title, along with a laudatory description in a poetic account of the exhibition, show that it marked another departure in Penny's exhibition practice.<sup>52</sup> Depicting a rural labourer returning to his contented family, it seems likely to have been an early example of a 'cottage door' scene of the kind that Thomas Gainsborough was to make famous in the following decade. For his next exhibit in 1768 Penny again submitted a single work, this time featuring a historical subject. *The Generous Behaviour of the Chevalier Baiard* (fig. 12) took as its theme an episode from the life of the late medieval French soldier, Pierre Terail, Seigneur de Bayard, immortalised as *le chevalier sans peur et sans reproche*. Although the current location of this work is also unknown, it was reproduced as a mezzotint engraving from which we can gain a good impression of its appearance. Bayard is shown refusing to take advantage of a virtuous and distressed maiden who has been forced into prostitution out of obedience to her well-bred but widowed and penurious mother. Penny was clearly concerned to create a suitably historical representation of this classic scene, showing all the characters in early seventeenth-century dress and placing them in a room

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<sup>49</sup> The phrase comes from a review in the *St. James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, 7 May 1765.

<sup>50</sup> Hargraves, *Candidates for Fame*, pp. 56, 58.

<sup>51</sup> He was, for example, a signatory with Newton on the lease agreement for the Society's exhibition venue in 1767: Royal Academy of Arts, Papers of the Incorporated Society of Artists of Great Britain, SA/23/9. See also Hargraves, *Candidates for Fame*, pp. 69, 73.

<sup>52</sup> Anon., *Le Pour et le Contre: Being a Poetical Display of the Merit and Demerit of the Capital Paintings Exhibited at Spring Gardens* (London, 1767), p. 14.

replete with ‘gothick’ details. With its combination of a complex, multi-figural composition and its concern for antiquarian detail, this was arguably the most ambitious historical work that Penny had yet undertaken, with one critic noting that ‘This is one of the best pieces in the room; and though not painted in a *grand gusto*, is done in a stile very becoming the subject’.<sup>53</sup>

In the same year, Penny submitted works to a further, special exhibition of the Society of Artists. Intended to show the Society in the best possible light, it was conceived in relation to the informal English tour of the nineteen-year-old King of Denmark, Christian VII. Having heard of his visit, the directors of the Society wrote to Count Bernstorff, the King’s secretary, to invite him to ‘see the State of the Polite Arts of this Kingdom’.<sup>54</sup> After receiving an affirmative reply from Bernstorff, the Society rapidly assembled a group of works by their leading members, including four by Penny – his recently exhibited *The Generous Behaviour of the Chevalier Baiard*, along with *The Death of General Wolfe*, *The Marquis of Granby Relieving a Sick Soldier* and an additional work that had not been previously shown, *A Poet in Distress*. Penny, along with the other principal officers of the Society – the President, Francis Hayman, the Secretary, Francis Milner Newton, and the Treasurer, Sir William Chambers – conducted the King and his party around the exhibition on 3 October 1768.<sup>55</sup> It must have seemed like a new highpoint for the Society, and it is of interest that Penny again chose to show his most ambitious and successful works, along with what can only have been another humorous piece in a markedly Hogarthian vein.<sup>56</sup>

Nevertheless, this moment of glory for the Society – and for Penny personally – could not wholly conceal a growing rift within its membership. The immediate trigger for dissent appears to have been suspicions that the Society’s hanging committee had been placing the works of a select group of favoured members in prominent positions within the exhibition room.<sup>57</sup> As Hargraves has shown, this became the trigger for broader concerns that a group of the Society’s senior members

<sup>53</sup> Anon., *Critical Observations on the Pictures Which are Now Exhibiting at the Great Room, Spring-Garden, Charing-Cross, by the Society of Artists of Great Britain, 1768* (London, 1768), p. 10.

<sup>54</sup> Matthew Hargraves, *Candidates for Fame*, p. 82.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>56</sup> This work is also currently untraced, but the theme appears to derive from Hogarth’s *The Distress Poet* from 1736, of which a recent discussion can be found in Mark Hallet and Christine Riding, *Hogarth*, exh. cat. (London, Tate Gallery, 2006), cat. nos. 70, 71.

<sup>57</sup> Hargraves, *Candidates for Fame*, p. 69.

had developed a monopoly of power within the institution by using their influence to repeatedly secure their re-election as directors.<sup>58</sup> A group of discontented Fellows, known as the Howdalians, moved to break the directors' hold by introducing a new bylaw that would make one third of their number ineligible for re-election each year. In accordance with the letter, but perhaps not the spirit, of the Society's constitution, the directors refused to introduce the new bylaw, further exacerbating tensions between the two groups. Within days of the King of Denmark's visit, a further meeting of the rebellious Fellows succeeded in securing the support of a majority of the membership, and shortly afterwards the Society's election saw Hayman and Penny ejected from their positions and replaced by John Joshua Kirby and Richard Paton respectively. In protest against the coup, Penny and seven of his fellow Directors – including some of the most prominent names in the Society – collectively resigned from their positions on 10 November 1768.<sup>59</sup> This bold move hinted that something significant was going on in the background, and so proved the case. Exactly one month later, it emerged that the dispossessed artists had succeeded in securing the King's support to establish a new Royal Academy.

Penny appears to have taken a prominent role in the establishment of the new institution. Although he was not one of the four former members of the Society of Artists who attended the crucial royal audience on 28 November that secured the King's support for the new institution, he was part of the group of practitioners who regularly came together at Joseph Wilton's house to work out its practical details. Indeed, Penny's influence within this group was clearly considerable: it seems that he prevented Chambers from appointing himself to the presidency by arguing that it should be given instead to a painter, thus opening the way for Joshua Reynolds's appointment to the position.<sup>60</sup> He also appears to have played a critical role in the delicate negotiations needed to persuade several prominent artists to join the new Academy: at the first General Assembly of the Academicians, Penny received a vote of thanks 'for his Activity in bringing several worthy Members into the Society'.<sup>61</sup> This was a significant achievement. The collective resignation of the Directors from

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 60-69.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 80-86. For the artists involved – Chambers, Newton, Joseph Wilton, Richard Wilson, George Michael Moser, Benjamin West and Paul Sandby – see p. 85.

<sup>60</sup> Saumarez Smith, *The Company of Artists*, p. 58.

<sup>61</sup> Royal Academy of Arts, RAA/GA/1, Royal Academy General Assembly Minutes for 2 January 1769, f. 9.

the Society of Artists in November 1768 was a decidedly political manoeuvre that could not have failed to remind onlookers of the Duke of Newcastle's controversial withdrawal from the ministry in 1746 and 1762.<sup>62</sup> As such, it was clearly a high risk strategy that could easily have alienated other senior members of the Society, from whom the Academy's fellowship would have to be drawn. The successful recruitment of twenty-two signatories to the petition and a further fourteen leading artists, who together formed the founding Academicians, was therefore instrumental in assuring the credibility of the new institution.<sup>63</sup> By December 1768, then, Penny was firmly ensconced within the inner circle of the most prestigious art institution in the British Isles, and ready to transform the humiliation of his removal from the Society of Artists' vice-presidency into an enduring triumph.

### III

Having played such an important role in the establishment of the Royal Academy, Penny was in a strong position to secure one of its tenured offices. Indeed, most of the main players in the establishment of the Academy went on to secure executive positions in the institution: Chambers became the Treasurer; Francis Milner Newton, the Secretary; George Michael Moser, the Keeper; while Paul Sandby's brother, Thomas, became the Professor of Architecture, thereby excluding Chambers's chief rival, Robert Adam, from a position for which he was a highly plausible candidate.<sup>64</sup> Penny's professorship was, however, something more than a mere *fait accompli*. It is striking, for example, that it is Penny to whom the Academicians turned to define the elaborate iconography of the Academy's gold medal, suggesting that he was well-

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<sup>62</sup> Richard Pares states that 'Newcastle's characteristic device [for superseding the King's authority] was the collective resignation: he brought it off in 1746, was ready to try it again in 1757, and once more, with far less success, against George III in 1762'. See Richard Pares, *King George III and the Politicians* (Oxford, 1953), p. 95. For more on the idea of collective resignation, see p. 101.

<sup>63</sup> For the petition and the foundation members, see Saumarez Smith, *The Company of Artists*, pp. 54-55, 70-86.

<sup>64</sup> For Chambers's primacy within the Academy, and his willingness to use it to protect his interests, see Nicholas Savage, 'The "Viceroy" of the Academy: Sir William Chambers and the Royal Protection of the Arts', in John Harris and Michael Snodin (eds), *Sir William Chambers: Architect to George III* (New Haven and London, 1996), pp. 193-98 (and notes on p. 219), esp. pp. 196-97.

recognised for his classical learning.<sup>65</sup> When combined with his membership of the circle of Continentally-trained artists, as well as his highly respectable personal circumstances, Penny must have seemed like a natural choice for the position. All that would have counted for little, however, without his solid record of success in the exhibition room.<sup>66</sup> In only six years as an active exhibitor with the Society of Artists, Penny had produced a series of exhibition submissions remarkable for their range and diversity. By the time of his resignation from the Society of Artists in 1768, the artist had produced works that spanned almost the full spectrum of genres available to a figure painter short of full-blown history painting: small full-length portraits; literary and theatrical subjects; portrayals of martial virtue; comic paintings in a Hogarthian idiom; evocative depictions of rural life; and, a meticulously researched episode from French chivalric history.

It is not only for their diversity, however, that Penny's works of this period stand out. In recent years, the work of David Solkin has enabled us to appreciate the extent to which Penny's success as an exhibitor reflected his exceptional ability to negotiate the complex challenges posed by London's emergent exhibition culture. In his article 'Portraiture in Motion', Solkin has argued that *The Marquis of Granby Relieving a Sick Soldier* must be seen as an innovative attempt to develop a form of art that possessed a peculiarly significant dual or hybrid quality. In a close visual and narrative analysis of Penny's image, Solkin shows that its basic composition was derived from Johann Zoffany's nearly contemporary theatrical conversation piece, *David Garrick in 'The Farmer's Return'*. However, whereas Zoffany's piece was straightforwardly comic and accessible, Penny imbued his work with greater moral significance. As Solkin points out, the portrayal of Granby's charitable act recalls not only depictions of the parable of the Good Samaritan but traditional portrayals of soldier-saints such as St Martin of Tours.<sup>67</sup> Because of this, Penny's work would also have had religious resonances for contemporary viewers, endowing it with a degree of moral and spiritual authority untypical of small-scale conversation pieces.

Even more significantly, Solkin relates Penny's portrayal of Granby to the most probable original model for this type of tripartite composition, Paolo de Matteis's

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<sup>65</sup> Saumarez Smith, *The Company of Artists*, pp. 150-53.

<sup>66</sup> Hargraves, *Candidates for Fame*, p. 58.

<sup>67</sup> Solkin, 'Portraiture in Motion', p. 9.

*The Choice of Hercules*. This work, which was explicitly intended to embody Shaftesbury's highly influential theory of historical painting, portrays the ancient Greek hero's choice between two female figures that respectively allegorise a virtuous life dedicated to the selfless pursuit of public duty and a corrupt life of indulgence and private pleasure. As in Mattheis's image, Penny's *Granby* places the hero between two realms. In this case, Solkin argues that the soldiers on the left of the picture space must be seen to embody a public sphere of military duty whilst the suffering soldier on the right symbolises the private realm of individual suffering. Granby, then, becomes a figure who mediates between the two but in a way that fundamentally transforms the meaning of Mattheis's composition. Hercules must choose between the public and private realms as two competing alternatives: in order to tread the selfless path of public virtue he must abjure the selfish pursuit of private pleasure. Granby, by contrast, is able to reconcile them. By responding to his private feelings of sympathy for the soldier, Granby temporarily abandons his public duties but in a way that will ultimately benefit the public realm. The recovered soldier will return to his regiment, thus swelling its numbers, whilst also providing an encouraging exemplification of the Marquis's benevolent concern for his troops. Penny's representation can therefore be seen as an image that operates across traditional artistic boundaries at both the formal and narrative levels. Formally, it mediates between the artistic genres of the conversation piece and the history painting; as a pictorial narrative, it deploys sympathetic feeling to bridge the gap between the worlds of public duty and private interest.

Solkin goes on to suggest that this new hybrid form of art proved so successful because it mirrored with particular fidelity the propensities, desires and predilections of an urban middling class. At precisely this time, this group was seeking to extend its social and political influence with unprecedented assertiveness and was developing a new ideological framework in order to do so.<sup>68</sup> This meant opposing the traditional aristocratic claim that the mercantile and artisan classes were incapable of responsibly exercising political power because their concern with private gain made it impossible to rise above their selfish preoccupations and identify with the needs of the nation as a whole. Advancing an alternative perspective, writers like Adam Smith and David Hume argued that, on the contrary,

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 17.

private desire and the greater public interest were not contradictory but complementary.<sup>69</sup> In the realm of economics, the needs of the whole were best served by a self-regulating free market underpinned by the pursuit of rational self-interest; and, politically and morally, the foundation of public virtue was not selfless transcendence of ‘natural’ selfishness, but the ‘natural’ moral emotion of sympathy.<sup>70</sup> Solkin sees in Penny’s work a thoroughgoing embodiment of these principals.<sup>71</sup> Penny’s introduction of historical themes to the conversation piece operated in the realm of art precisely as Smith and Hume’s ideology did in the realms of politics, economics and morality: it infused a form traditionally derided as selfish, that of the portrait, with greater dignity and, in doing so, enabled it to lay claim to something of the authority associated with the more aristocratic mode of historical art. It is no coincidence, then, that Penny’s work similarly operated to reformulate martial heroism, transforming it from a remote aristocratic ideal of self-transcendence – as represented by Mattheis’s *The Choice of Hercules* – into a more accessible alternative ideal based, as in *Granby*, upon sympathetic engagement with the sufferings of others.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, Solkin maintains that this presentation of an exemplary instance of benevolence and generosity had more in common with the publicity materials of charity hospitals – which at this time were attempting to broaden their base of subscribers by targeting exactly the same urban middling audience as the new art exhibitions – than with traditional heroic imagery.<sup>73</sup>

Solkin has since developed this argument further in his major history of eighteenth-century British art, *Painting for Money*. Here, he reiterates his analysis of *Granby* while enlarging his discussion to include Penny’s *The Death of General Wolfe*. Drawing on, but fundamentally rethinking, Charles Mitchell’s 1944 discussion of the artist’s painting of Wolfe, Solkin again draws out the innovative – indeed subversive – qualities of the image. For Mitchell, Penny’s work, though of interest as an early example of a British historical subject in contemporary costume, was ultimately a failure. This was because, even though Penny had based the compositional and narrative structures on esteemed Old Master precedents, these had not succeeded in imbuing his highly literal depiction with the authority of a true history painting.

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8, 11-12.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7-12.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14-17.

Penny, he wrote, ‘adhered too closely to the “facts of the transaction” to convey, in the particular instance, an air of ideal heroism’. As Solkin makes clear, however, contemporary critics explicitly distinguished Penny’s work from historical painting and instead classed it as a ‘conversation’. In this light, it is mistaken to dismiss Penny’s work as a history painting that was ‘too literally realistic’; in scale and treatment it was an intimate conversation piece into which the themes and traditions of historical painting had been introduced. In constructing his image in this way, Penny was able to stress the physical and emotional reality of Wolfe’s final moments with unprecedented vividness and immediacy. The result was a scene of striking pathos that, by evoking sympathy more than admiration, fundamentally reconfigured, rather than failed to attain, the heroic ideal of conventional historical painting. Penny’s representation, Solkin therefore concludes, was an entirely new kind of painting, ‘a far more radical intervention into the tradition of heroic art than the so-called “revolution of history painting” that has been credited to Benjamin West’.<sup>74</sup>

By building on Solkin’s work, then, we can begin to piece together an image of Penny as a highly distinctive and inventive artist. Rather than being a failed history painter or a minor practitioner of narrative art, he emerges as the pioneer of an artistic approach that sought to reconcile a complex array of potentially contradictory components. In a series of pictures that were invariably executed on the scale of modest conversation pieces, Penny displayed a thematic range, level of compositional ambition and variety of visual reference previously alien to such works. The heroic, historical and literary themes that he introduced to this type of exhibition painting, moreover, were fundamentally transformed as he adapted them to meet the tastes and preferences of London’s socially-varied exhibition audience. This accretion of multiple levels of signification in single works can be seen, on the one hand, to have raised the modest form of the conversation piece to the level of history painting whilst, on the other hand, endowing history painting with unprecedented accessibility and emotional immediacy. The result was a new composite form of painting that, in spite of eluding straightforward categorisation, has now come to be regarded as Penny’s most important artistic contribution.

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<sup>74</sup> Solkin, *Painting for Money*, pp. 207-209.

But what of Penny's later works? If he was capable of such inventiveness in the 1760s, what of his work when his career apparently reached its zenith during his Academy professorship? Ironically enough, according to Solkin, it was precisely Penny's absorption into this self-consciously elitist institution that spelled the end of his artistic inventiveness. Penny's peculiarly hybrid form of historical art was made possible by the relatively open and inclusive exhibition world of the 1760s. The foundation of the Academy marked the beginning of a phase of reaction that saw traditional historical painting once again promoted as the exclusive model of artistic excellence. Indeed, Solkin implies that Reynolds specifically targeted works like Penny's for catering too readily to popular tastes.<sup>75</sup> This is hardly an environment, it would seem, in which the artist's hybrid model of painting, with its concern to repackage the values of historical art for a wide audience, could flourish. In this view, the type of art that Penny had previously practised lost its ambitious edge and retreated into domestic subject matter. In Solkin's account, then, there was a fundamental discontinuity, a period of hiatus, in artistic innovation that corresponded to the dominance of Reynolds's artistic theory in the first decades of the Royal Academy's existence.

## IV

In this thesis, however, I wish to present an alternative perspective, suggesting that, far from impeding Penny's capacity for invention and experiment, the new institutional environment of the Royal Academy actively encouraged it. At the heart of my interpretation is the claim that, throughout the period that followed the emergence of the exhibiting societies, artists had to confront and find solutions to what was fundamentally the same basic artistic problem. This problem can usefully be approached in terms of the three basic human motivations which John Gwynn, writing on behalf of London's artistic community in 1755, identified in the preface to his *Plan of An Academy*: 'Pleasure, Profit, Fame,' he observed, 'are the great Ends of

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<sup>75</sup> Solkin, 'Portraiture in Motion', pp. 17-18.

every pursuit, public or private'.<sup>76</sup> As almost all the institutional artistic initiatives undertaken by eighteenth-century British artists testify, there was a widespread belief that the contemporary art market had failed to reconcile these three 'great Ends'. It was well known that accomplished portrait painters had a ready market in England. But while a flattering portrait contributed to the sitter's 'pleasure' (the vain delight of seeing one's own image) and 'fame' (such images became markers of status and distinction), it brought the artist little more than 'profit'. This was because portrait painting was routinely dismissed as a matter of mere mechanical skill, and was consequently seen neither as a pleasurable vocation nor as a sound foundation for an enduring artistic fame. These ends could be attained, it was believed, only through the pursuit of the higher, more intellectually sophisticated, genres, especially historical painting.

Unfortunately, even in the mid-eighteenth century, the active market for such works remained negligible, with the few potential patrons wealthy and discriminating enough to contemplate commissioning historical works preferring to buy pictures by Continental Old Masters. The few opportunities that did exist, moreover, were often less than wholly satisfactory. The most notable example is probably the series of more than fifty paintings that Francis Hayman produced between 1741 and 1764 for Jonathan Tyers's public pleasure ground at Vauxhall Gardens. Hayman's works were highly varied and included *fêtes galantes* of children's games, Shakespearean scenes, and four monumental historical paintings for the Saloon adjoining the Rotunda, the grandest space in the gardens. However, since the gardens were both a place of recreation and a commercial enterprise, Hayman naturally had to compromise the dignity and refinement of the prestigious genres to which his works belonged in order to ensure that his works brought straightforward pleasure to his viewers. Even the artist's historical pictures made use of overtly patriotic and highly familiar contemporary subject matter and, in doing so, greatly modified the 'grand manner' in order to accommodate it to the tastes and cultural resources of its varied audience.

Clearly, some more satisfactory source of commissions was required. The initial belief seems to have been that if British artists could only show that they were

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<sup>76</sup> John Gwynn, *The Plan of An Academy for the Better Cultivation, Improvement and Encouragement of Painting, Sculpture, Architecture and the Arts of Design in General* (London, 1755), p. iii.

capable of producing sophisticated historical works buyers could be weaned from their preference for the Old Masters. This conviction is perhaps most evident in the mid-1740s, only a few years after Hayman began his Vauxhall Gardens paintings. At this time, William Hogarth, Francis Hayman, Joseph Highmore and James Wills created and donated ‘grand manner’ historical paintings of biblical subjects to the Foundling Hospital, a recently established charitable foundation dedicated to the care of abandoned infants.<sup>77</sup> While the artists were clearly in sympathy with the aims of the Hospital, they also hoped that their works would attract public attention and thereby encourage British patrons to begin commissioning similarly ambitious works. Unfortunately, although much admired, the Foundling paintings failed to generate significant numbers of new commissions. Thus, while they may have contributed to the fame of the artists and the pleasure of the public, they did little to align these desirable ends with the need to make a profit.

By the late 1750s, London’s artists had come to the conclusion that the only way to attract the kind of patronage they sought was through a dedicated and dignified forum for the display of modern British works of art, a ‘museum of our own’, in Hayman’s famous words.<sup>78</sup> This led directly to the establishment of London’s first public art exhibition, held under the aegis of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (SEAMC) by an informal grouping that referred to itself as the ‘Present Artists’. The Present Artists’ exhibition opened in the SEAMC’s Great Room on 21 April 1760 to massive public acclaim. At last, it seemed, there would be a sufficiently prestigious and specialised forum for the display of modern British art.<sup>79</sup> What the artists had not reckoned on, however, was the complex and unpredictable way in which the conspicuous success of the new exhibitions would reconfigure the relationship between pleasure, profit and fame. Instead of simply leading to an expanded market for the more elevated kinds of art, and historical painting in particular, the exhibition audience and the whole apparatus of published criticism that served to guide it, proved to have preferences and predilections of their own. Thus, from the outset the public exhibition proved to be a

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<sup>77</sup> For the most comprehensive account of the Foundling Hospital as a forum for the display of art, see Solkin, *Painting for Money*, pp. 158-74.

<sup>78</sup> Hargraves, *Candidates for Fame*, p. 17.

<sup>79</sup> Solkin, *Painting for Money*, p. 175.

complex and contested space that did not reliably bestow the kind of fame or, indeed, profit that the artists – especially the more eminent among them – were seeking.

This basic tension between the straightforward reality of the exhibition as a heterogeneous and unpredictable public space, the resort of a diverse and unpredictable pleasure-seeking audience, and its aspirational ideality as the medium for advancing the social and cultural status of British art lies at the heart of what will be here referred to as the ‘exhibition problem’. In sum, how were artists to reconcile their desire to secure acclaim and commercial success from a diverse public with as yet relatively unformed tastes with their desire to actively shape that taste so that British buyers could be induced to support a native school of art that would rival in fame and repute its better-established Continental peers? Was it possible or desirable to compromise with popular preferences, or should artists seek to preserve the purity and prestige of traditional history painting?

This problem was already giving rise to conflict at the time of the first exhibition. At the insistence of the SEAMC, entrance to the first exhibition was free, and many of the leading artists balked at the consequent social diversity of the exhibition audience. ‘This prostitution of the polite arts’, Gwynn huffily recalled, ‘undoubtedly became extremely disagreeable to the professors themselves, who heard alike, their works censored or approved by kitchen-maids and stable-boys’.<sup>80</sup> Such reservations can be seen as one of the principal factors behind the sustained pattern of fissure and fragmentation that formed the prelude to the Royal Academy’s creation. Those practitioners who sought to prioritise the status and dignity of art – and, of course, artists – withdrew from the existing organisation to establish their own more exclusive and prestigious exhibition venues, while others sought to promote a more open and inclusive style of exhibition. This first happened in 1761, when a substantial body of the original ‘Present Artists’ withdrew from the SEAMC’s exhibition to form the Society of Artists of Great Britain, while the rump of remaining exhibitors went on to form the rival Free Society of Artists. The Society of Artists immediately introduced an entrance fee of one shilling to exclude ‘the menial servants and their acquaintance’ who had so compromised the dignity of the SEAMC exhibition, and additionally made determined efforts to raise the standard of

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<sup>80</sup> John Gwynn, *London and Westminster Improved, Illustrated by Plans, To Which is Prefixed, A Discourse on Publick Magnificence* (London, 1766), pp. 24-25.

the exhibits by excluding many of the amateur and novelty works – in needlework, feather and hair – that had distracted the public from the more elevated works on display.

However, even this did not forge a sustainable consensus: as we have seen, the alleged attempts of the senior members of the Society of Artists to guide its development and shape public perceptions of the exhibits eventually provoked the wider fellowship to seek a more diverse body of Directors. This, of course, led the dispossessed Directors to again withdraw from the existing organisation to seek the King's support to establish a Royal Academy as a still more exclusive and dignified institutional environment for the advancement of the arts. Aside from enjoying the prestige that came with the support of the nation's ultimate patron, the newly-founded institution, in a dramatic move to improve and order the fine arts in Britain, united the functions of a professional association, an exhibition society, and a public art school.<sup>81</sup>

In all three domains, the Academy sought to establish the dignity and order that its ambitious creators considered desirable. As a professional organisation, the Academy's decision to restrict its membership to forty artists 'of the first rank in their several professions' ensured that it would become a self-perpetuating oligarchy of suitably eminent practitioners. As an educational institution, the Academy would have a quartet of permanent Professors and a rotating staff of tutors drawn from the ranks of the Academicians to act as authoritative sources of knowledge and guidance for the students. This authority was used to promote a rigorous and lengthy training based on progressive mastery of the very highest standards of draughtsmanship; on conformity to strict precepts and rules; and on adherence to the tenets of 'grand manner' historical art. As an exhibiting society, the Academy ensured that its executive officers would have total discretion over the composition and conduct of the exhibition hanging committee. The hang would therefore quite naturally be expected to privilege the most elevated forms of art, especially those by the

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<sup>81</sup> The quotation is taken from Anon., 'An Account of the Institution of a Royal Academy of Arts under His Majesty's Patronage', *The Gentleman's Magazine*, supplement to vol. 38 (December 1768): 603. For the most comprehensive account of the early development of the Royal Academy, see Holgar Hooock, *The King's Artists*. The institution's dual function is discussed by Hooock in the book's opening chapters; see pp. 19-51, 52-79. Other useful studies of the Academy's art school include Sidney C. Hutchinson, 'The Royal Academy Schools, 1768-1830', *Walpole Society*, vol. 38 (1962): 123-91 and Walter Lamb, *The Royal Academy: A Short History of its Foundation and Development to the Present Day* (London, 1935).

Academicians themselves. Essentially, then, the Royal Academy was given licence to enforce the hierarchies, artistic and pedagogic, that the disruptive forces of the public exhibition had threatened to disturb.

Nevertheless, there was still no escaping the pressures exerted by the growing popular appetite for art exhibitions.<sup>82</sup> To begin with, the Academy's claims to authority were highly contested. Indeed, the institution's unique cultural status as a royal institution in certain respects made its situation especially complex and challenging. Once installed, the new Academicians could readily be criticised for having become 'menial servants' or subservient courtiers – in effect a ministry of painting – who, like George III's own personal favourite Lord Bute, had purposefully set out to create division and faction to further their own interests.<sup>83</sup> The Academy's distinctly cosmopolitan membership and cultural outlook further courted controversy as it was easily portrayed as a distinctly un-British and unpatriotic entity.<sup>84</sup> When combined with its royal patronage, this left the new Royal Academy all too vulnerable to being seen as the unwelcome usurper of British artistic liberty by Continental-style artistic absolutism; this was especially the case for critics in the radical Wilkesite *Middlesex Journal*.<sup>85</sup> Thus, for all its efforts to create an impregnable bastion to protect the most exalted artistic values, the Academy's status had nevertheless to be actively secured by attracting a critical mass of support from the artistic community, the press and the wider public.

This presented certain difficulties. On the one hand, the Academy's artists were publicly committed to a classicising artistic programme, and were further expected to uphold the dignity and honour of their royal patron by producing works that embodied the highest artistic ideals. On the other hand, they had to function at the apex of an ever more commercialised art world where the Academy's exhibitions – attended by throngs of visitors from varied social backgrounds – came to hold a

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<sup>82</sup> The Society's inaugural exhibition attracted over 20,000 visitors, establishing the event as a key social occasion in the capital. See Iain Pears, *The Discovery of Painting: The Growth of Interest in the Arts in England, 1680-1768* (New Haven and London, 1988), p. 127.

<sup>83</sup> For more on the notion of subservience and division in the context of the King's ministry, see Pears, *King George III*, pp. 93-142 (the terms are specifically mentioned on p. 102).

<sup>84</sup> For the Academy's close affinity with Continental models and the hostile perceptions to which this gave rise, see Shearer West, 'Xenophobia and Xenomania: Italians and the English Royal Academy', in *idem* (ed.), *Italian Culture in Northern Europe in the Eighteenth Century* (1999; Cambridge, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2010), pp. 116-39.

<sup>85</sup> See *The Middlesex Journal*, 6-8 July 1769; 8-10 February 1770; 3-5 May 1770.

central place. Moreover, while the Academy's growing success did provide it with some real leverage to shape public taste, there was no escaping the fact that the art market continued to offer few real opportunities for the 'grand manner' art that the Academy was committed to fostering. As Thomas Gainsborough commented in response to Reynolds's fifth Discourse, delivered to the Academy on 10 December 1772, "betwixt Friends Sir Joshua either forgets, or does not chuse [to] see that his instruction is all calculated to form the History Painter, which he must know there is no call for in this country".<sup>86</sup> This meant that the necessity for some kind of accommodation with the heterogeneous and still often unsophisticated tastes of the public remained as pressing as ever, but with the further demand that this accommodation should be accomplished without sacrificing the Academy's elevated principles. Thus, while the foundation of the Academy did mark an important point of transition, in other respects, the Academicians had to confront the same fundamental structural challenges that had characterised the exhibition societies before 1768; indeed, the Academy's peculiar situation in certain respects made the exhibition problem even more acute and intractable.

## V

As this thesis seeks to make clear, Penny's Academy career can be seen as a sustained and influential attempt to engage with, and resolve, this problem. Indeed, I will argue that Penny's post-1768 output represents a unique attempt to fulfil the Academy's lofty artistic mission without recourse to overtly classicising or 'grand manner' modes of practice. Thus, far from representing the end of Penny's willingness to experiment with forms of painting that transgressed conventional artistic boundaries, the Academy provided an essential stimulus not only to its continuation but its further development. Throughout his Academy works, I will suggest, Penny can be seen to have persisted with the kind of broadly appealing and

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<sup>86</sup> Michael Rosenthal, 'Gainsborough's Cottage Doors: A Matter of Modernity', in Ann Bermingham (ed.) *Sensation & Sensibility: Viewing Gainsborough's 'Cottage Door'* (New Haven and London, 2005), pp. 77-95, esp. p. 82, quoting from John Hayes (ed.), *The Letters of Thomas Gainsborough* (New Haven and London, 2001), pp. 112-14, letter no. 65, Gainsborough to William Hoare, from Bath. The situation remained much the same even in the early 1800s: see Hook, *The King's Artists*.

accessible themes that he had begun to explore at the Society of Artists. However, confronted by the need to meet the demands of the increasingly dignified environment of the Academy's exhibitions, especially after the institution's move to Somerset House, Penny sought to develop a mode of painting that would embody the artistic, ethical and intellectual qualities expected of the Academy's Professor of Painting. As I hope to show, Penny finally succeeded, after much exploration and several wrong turns, in drawing together the most successful elements of his earlier practice into a single coherent form. This mode of painting was defined by its focus on familiar subject matter drawn from contemporary life; its vivid engagement with human incident and emotion; its emphatic moral and didactic purpose; its explicit or implicit use of pictorial and narrative contrast to heighten its psychological effect; and its complex allusions to pictorial and literary models and sources. Finally, it seemed, Penny had found a form of art that was capable of satisfying the varied tastes of the Academy's heterogeneous audience, while embodying the highest cultural values.

The result, I will argue, was a pioneering form of 'genre' painting, that is to say part of the enduring tradition of depicting highly particularised, small-scale scenes from everyday life. This tradition can be traced back to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Netherlandish painters such as Adriaen van Ostade, David Teniers, Jan Steen, Gerard Terborch and Gabriel Metsu, and came, over the course of the nineteenth century, to be distinguished from the other modes of non-historical art – including landscape, still life, and animal painting – that had previously been grouped together as *peinture de genre*.<sup>87</sup> Looking back to the example of Dutch art, still frequently dismissed as inferior to the higher genres of history and portraiture, Penny succeeded in reviving and adapting this type of imagery in a form wholly fitted to the Academy. Moreover, in spite of the subsequent eclipse of Penny's own work, I will argue that the artist's new and distinctive form of genre painting provided an important model for numerous later British exhibition painters. This included not just Penny's immediate followers and near contemporaries but also several later artists, most notably David

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<sup>87</sup> For the recognition of 'genre painting' as a distinct artistic category, see Wolfgang Stechow and Christopher Comer, 'The History of the Term *Genre*', *Allen Memorial Museum Bulletin*, vol. 33, pt. 2 (1975): 89-94 and Harry Mount, 'The Reception of Dutch Genre Painting in England, 1695-1829' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1991), pp. 9-10.

Wilkie, whose approach to genre painting has usually been set in opposition to its eighteenth century precedents.

The primary source of evidence I draw upon to substantiate my interpretation will be the series of subject paintings that Penny submitted to the Academy exhibitions between his initial appointment as Professor of Painting in 1768 and his withdrawal from active artistic practice in 1783. My focus on these materials is in part an expression of practical necessity: in the course of my researches I have been able to identify few sources of information in the major archives and repositories beyond occasional references to Penny's administrative functions in the records of the Society of Artists and the Royal Academy, and a number of fragmentary mentions in the memoirs and correspondences of contemporaries and near contemporaries. However, the absolutely central role Penny's images play in my analysis also reflects my concern to engage deeply with individual artworks. For this reason, I have chosen to employ a methodological approach that combines close readings of individual paintings with a broader consideration of their original cultural and aesthetic context, drawing primarily on the model offered by Mark Hallett's recent analysis of Joshua Reynolds's 1778 portrait of *The Marlborough Family*.<sup>88</sup> Hallett's discussion shows how close attentiveness to the multiple layers of signification that lie within even a single image can greatly enhance our understanding both of its original purposes and the way it related to, and operated within, its original context. In each case, then, my starting point is a careful consideration of the image's compositional and narrative structure; upon this basis, I seek to identify the pictorial and textual sources upon which Penny drew to formulate his work. This enables me to consider more deeply the broader meanings that the artist intended his pictures to convey to his audience, as well as their contemporary critical reception. Applying this process to each work in turn, I hope to do justice to their specificity as aesthetic objects as well as to elucidate their complex historical meanings and, by noting their relationships with each other, to establish the evolving strategy that Penny deployed to address the challenges posed by the exhibition problem.

In my first two chapters, I examine Penny's earliest exhibition works: *The Blacksmiths* and *Imogen Discovered in the Cave*, exhibited in 1769 and 1770

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<sup>88</sup> Mark Hallett, 'A Monument to Intimacy: Joshua Reynolds's *The Marlborough Family*', *Art History*, vol. 31, no. 5 (November 2008): 691-720.

respectively; and *Rosamond and Queen Eleanor* and *Lord Clive Explaining to the Nabob the Situation of the Invalids in India*, both exhibited in 1772. In my analysis of these paintings, I show how Penny, drawing directly on his experience as an exhibitor at the Society of Artists, continued to develop a mode of painting that privileged familiar vernacular subject matter over the classical themes more usually associated with Academic art. Penny's work, I therefore suggest, is more closely aligned with the works of artists such as Francis Hayman and Joseph Wright of Derby, who favoured a more accessible approach than that typical of archetypal Academic painters like West, Kauffman and Reynolds. At the same time, however, I also begin to identify the ways that Penny gradually began to modify his practice in order to ensure that his images could wholeheartedly lay claim to the dignity required of an Academic subject: first of all, by drawing on revered Shakespearean themes; by depicting venerable episodes from British history; and, in direct succession to his earlier *Wolfe* and *Granby*, by exemplifying the putatively benevolent actions of a celebrated soldier. In the case of *The Blacksmiths*, its claim to dignity was further reinforced by its establishmentarian political implications, whereas both *Imogen Discovered in the Cave* and *Lord Clive* were works which, in compositional complexity and grandeur of style, verged on full-blown history painting. I conclude my consideration of this early phase of Penny's Academy career by suggesting that the controversy generated by *Lord Clive*'s subject matter brought Penny's established strand of military imagery to an end, and precipitated a further, more intense period of experimentation in 1773-76.

The works of this period form the subject of my third chapter. Here, I consider two notably ambitious exhibition submissions: Penny's first formal exhibition pairing, *The Virtuous Comforted by Sympathy and Attention* and *The Profligate Punished by Neglect and Contempt* from 1774; and his most complex work on a historical theme, *Jane Shore Led to Do Penance at St. Paul's* from 1776. These pieces mark a watershed in Penny's career as an Academy exhibitor. With his *The Virtuous Comforted* and *The Profligate Punished*, Penny for the first time exhibited a pair of pendant images of contemporary domestic life. Drawing on seventeenth-century Dutch examples as well as various British precedents to present two sharply differing views of a virtuous and a corrupt household, Penny's images hinged on a series of contrasts and consonances that combined to offer a clear moral lesson. By such

means, I argue, the artist endowed his images with an allegorical and emblematic dimension that aligned them not only with the higher purposes usually associated with history painting but also with religious literature and especially contemporary sermons. These works, then, constitute the first major example of Penny's moralised mode of genre painting. In *Jane Shore Led to Do Penance at St. Paul's*, by contrast, Penny attempted perhaps his single most ambitious 'British' historical work. This image, exceptional in his *oeuvre* for its scale and compositional complexity, combined an antiquarian concern for accurate historical detail with a highly affecting scene of female suffering. It also, I go on to show, makes unusually direct reference to contemporary debates and events, tying Penny to a reformist agenda that was to become an increasingly important concern of his artistic work. I then bring this chapter to an end by reconsidering the place of this piece in Penny's exhibition career, showing how his grandest attempt at historical painting presented the artist with seemingly irresolvable challenges.

The relative critical and artistic failure of *Jane Shore Led to Do Penance* provides the background for my fourth and final chapter, where I show how Penny abandoned his ambitions to produce conventional historical works and instead returned to the moralised mode of genre painting he had developed in 1774. I begin by considering *A Boy Taken Out of the Water Drowned* and *The Boy by Proper Means Recovered*, the artist's submission to the Academy's 1780 exhibition, the first held at its new premises in Somerset House. This pairing, which depicted the successful resuscitation of a young boy after an apparently tragic drowning incident, constituted Penny's second pair of contrasted images. In these works, the artist combined the focus on contemporary life and the didactic purposes evident in *The Virtuous Comforted* and *The Profligate Punished* with the concern for female suffering and the reforming agenda found in *Jane Shore Led to Do Penance*. Indeed, on this occasion, Penny's images were based directly on a contemporary sermon and were intended, like the sermon, to support the activities of a recently established charitable organisation, the Humane Society for the Recovery of Persons Apparently Drowned. Taking this opportunity to further develop the model of contrasted imagery utilised in his earlier moral works, Penny incorporated within his images carefully calculated narrative and formal correspondences as well as a wide range of learned allusions to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italian religious paintings. These works, then,

marked the artist's definitive commitment to his emerging identity as an 'ingenious moral painter'.<sup>89</sup> I then show how this same artistic identity emerges once again in his 1781 submission, *Lavinia, Daughter of the Once Rich Acasto, Discovered Gleaning*. Although this painting took as its subject a renowned literary work, James Thomson's pastoral poem *The Seasons*, Penny's treatment of the text displayed a contemporaneity and particularity that distinguished it from earlier depictions of the same theme. The principal characters display an almost portrait-like exactitude, to a degree that distressed some contemporary critics; but here too, I argue, we can detect the emblematic concerns and religious purposes more overtly evident in the artist's 1780 pairing. Penny's moralised form of genre painting, we can now see, had become a stable feature of his exhibition output.

Drawing my arguments to a close, I show in my Conclusion how Penny continued to submit similarly moralised genre paintings to the Academy's exhibitions until his retirement in 1783. Briefly considering the works he exhibited in this period, I consider how they sustained the didactic and reforming concerns of his previous exhibition submissions. I then go on to trace the subsequent development of Penny's model of genre painting, showing how it became a stable feature of the exhibition room in the following decades. Firstly, I look to Penny's own pupil, William Redmore Bigg, who produced a series of highly popular genre works, almost invariably incorporating an edifying moral story, over the course of his lengthy and lucrative career as an exhibition artist. Bigg was followed by artists such as George Morland and Francis Wheatley, who produced numerous works that adhered to the same basic formula, including pieces that openly recapitulate some of Penny's favourite themes. Even more significant, however, are the parallels between Penny's exhibition practice and that of the later generation of genre painters that emerged in the early nineteenth century. As David Solkin has shown in his *Painting Out of the Ordinary*, this new wave of genre painting took its rise from Wilkie's *Village Politicians*, which was exhibited to massive acclaim at the Royal Academy in 1806.<sup>90</sup> This form of painting rejected the simplified and softened form of moralised genre painting characteristic of Bigg, Morland and Wheatley, and reintroduced, in

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<sup>89</sup> The phrase comes from a newspaper article on the Humane Society pictures by 'an admirer' of Penny; this is discussed at greater length in chapter 4, section 1, pp. 182-87.

<sup>90</sup> David H. Solkin, *Painting Out of the Ordinary: Modernity and the Art of Everyday Life in Early Nineteenth-Century England* (New Haven and London, 2008), p. 7.

even stronger form, the highly vivid representation of varied social types and emotional states that, I claim here, distinguishes Penny's work from that of his followers. In this way, the artist emerges not merely as someone 'deserving more of our notice', but as the formative figure in the development of a distinctively 'British' mode of exhibition painting, a missing link between the fertile exhibition world of the 1760s and its more familiar nineteenth-century successor.

## CHAPTER ONE

### FORGING AN ACADEMY IDENTITY

When, on 17 December 1768, Edward Penny was elected to the Professorship of Painting at the newly established Royal Academy, he was taking on a post intended to sustain the grandest traditions of European art.<sup>91</sup> Indeed, even though there survive very few details of the professorial functions undertaken by Penny for the Academy, we know from the description of the position given in the institution's 'Instrument of Foundation' that the artist – like the Academy's own president, Sir Joshua Reynolds – was expected to focus on setting the parameters for a universally-applicable and formally 'correct' mode of painting based on Old Master models.<sup>92</sup> As the 'Instrument' declares, the Professor of Painting's role was to 'instruct the Students in the principals of composition, to form their taste of design and colouring, to strengthen their judgement, to point out to them the beauties and imperfections of celebrated works of Art, and the particular excellencies or defects of great masters...'.<sup>93</sup> In addition, the Professor was required to give six lectures each year, which, in order to ensure their conformity with the Academy's elevated principles, were not to be delivered until they had been approved by the institution's governing committee. It is easy to imagine how, with every detail carefully set in place (even the seating arrangements for the lectures appear to have been accorded extra attention, with, as the Academy's Council Minutes record, benches being laid out in a predetermined order for ordinary visitors and Academicians), these events became highly ritualised and hierarchical affairs designed to shape a discerning public and to set standards of taste by prescribing the criteria upon which the proper judgment of the fine arts should be based.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Saumarez Smith, *The Company of Artists*, p. 107.

<sup>92</sup> See para. 7 of the Instrument, reproduced in Hutchison, *The History of the Royal Academy*, pp. 211-12.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

<sup>94</sup> Unfortunately, none of the lectures that were delivered by Penny at the Royal Academy appear to have survived, in all probability because these events, constituting the earliest instructive discussions to be given on painting in Britain, were still too new to be systematically transcribed by the institution. From the frequent advertisements that crop up in such contemporary newspapers as the *Daily Advertiser* however, it is apparent that Penny's course of lectures typically took place towards the beginning or the end of each year, being timed to coincide with the start or finish of the Academy

Hierarchy, ritual, rectitude, taste, tradition, judgment: these were the principals to which the Academy was publicly committed and the characteristics that historians have emphasised in their accounts of eighteenth-century British art. Subscribing to aesthetic principles, institutional values, and pedagogic purposes synonymous with those of the venerable and highly revered Parisian and Florentine Academies, the new Royal Academy represented the most comprehensive attempt yet to advance the status of the fine arts in Britain.<sup>95</sup> With its ‘well-regulated schools of design’, its extensive collection of ‘choice casts of all the celebrated antique statues, groups, and basso relievos’, and its comprehensive library, the institution was superlatively equipped to advance an ambitious programme of reform.<sup>96</sup> Moreover, in its aim to appear more like the French and Italian Academies, the Royal Academy, besides excluding lesser practitioners such as engravers, gem carvers and wax modellers from its ranks, bestowed formal professorships on its most senior members: Thomas Sandby was made Professor of Architecture, whilst Dr William Hunter was appointed as Professor of Anatomy, Samuel Wale became Professor of Perspective and, as we have already mentioned, Penny was made Professor of Painting. In doing so, it further emphasised its commitment to an ordered and authoritative vision of artistic excellence. In every sense, it would appear, the new Royal Academy signalled a clear departure from what had gone before.

Certainly, the idea of the Academy as heralding a decisive shift in British artistic culture has come to form the dominant art-historical interpretation of the institution. While its predecessor and rival, the Society of Artists, has been seen as a relatively open and inclusive institution that focused primarily on using its annual exhibitions to advance the professional interests of its wide-ranging membership, the new Academy is uniformly – and understandably – portrayed as its polar opposite. In his pivotal book, *Painting for Money*, David Solkin not only stresses the significant divide between the Academy and the Society of Artists, but describes the relation between the two institutions as a complete ‘parting of the ways’.<sup>97</sup> According to

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season. For the entry specifying the particular seating arrangements that were to be followed at lectures, see Royal Academy of Arts, RAA/PC/1/1, Council Minutes for 10 January 1771, f. 97.

<sup>95</sup> For more on the status and role of these Continental institutions, see Anton W. A. Boschloo, Elwin J. Hendrikse, Laetitia C. Smit, and Gert Jan van der Sman (eds), *Academies of Art Between Renaissance and Romanticism* (Leiden, 1989), pp. 186-99.

<sup>96</sup> See Anon., ‘An Account of the Institution of the Royal Academy’: 603.

<sup>97</sup> See Solkin, *Painting for Money*, p. 266. Solkin’s argument is based on the premise that, when taken as a whole, each body of exhibited works possessed its own distinct character.

Solkin, whilst the Academy could be seen to align itself with an ‘aesthetic programme tied to pictorial art in the ‘grand manner’, the viewers at the Society of Artists’ post-1768 exhibitions ‘seem to have taken especial pleasure in fairly small-scale, highly particularised renderings of modern subjects, most of them genre scenes or conversations, and in a surprisingly high number of pictures which featured the sort of dramatic illumination commonly associated with the seventeenth-century Dutch tradition’.<sup>98</sup> A similar view is advanced by Holgar Hoock. To Hoock, the works at the latter institution were ‘generally accessible to the majority of viewers with only a basic degree of learning’, and so formed a stark contrast with the predominance of classical historical titles and full-length aristocratic and royal portraits that dominated, according to the *Lloyd’s* list, the Academy’s 1769 display.<sup>99</sup> Both authors, in other words, treat the Academy as an exclusive cultural enterprise that, far in advance of its rival, operated at the highest levels of the discipline.

Yet, as this chapter will seek to show, close consideration of the Academy’s first exhibitions not only calls this somewhat generalised reading of the institution into question but, more crucially, enables us to recover a vernacular or ‘counter-classical’ strand of imagery within the Royal display itself. Far from being exclusive to the Society of Artists and Vauxhall Gardens, this self-consciously localised form of painterly practice operated alongside – and thus co-existed with – the Continental ‘grand manner’ visual idiom usually deemed to be central to the new Academy. Indeed, artists working within this alternative vein seem to have represented a significant portion of the institution’s exhibiting community from 1768 onwards. Artists such as Francis Hayman, redeploying the predominantly ‘low’ and popular ‘pleasure garden’ aesthetic of these rival venues, exhibited pieces that were unmistakably non-heroic and vernacular in character. The most striking example of an artist operating in this mode, however, is provided by Penny. Indeed, it is chiefly through examining the artist’s early Academy performances and their relation to the broader mass of works on display within the Pall Mall exhibition room that the ultimately complex, even contradictory, position of the Royal Academy – and of his place within this institution – becomes apparent. Making Penny’s submissions to the Academy’s first two exhibitions – *The Blacksmiths* from 1769 and *Imogen*

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<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 266-67.

<sup>99</sup> Hoock, *The King’s Artists*, p. 207. The principal listing referred to by Hoock here is that which appeared in the *Lloyd’s Evening Post*, 1-3 May 1769.

*Discovered in the Cave* from 1770 – the central focus of discussion, this chapter will explore the ways in which these images related to and engaged with both prevailing Academic ideals and with the Academy's annual exhibitions. In doing so, it shows how Penny adopted and adapted his existing practice to make it more suited to the lofty aims of the Academy, while seeking to retain his distinctive concern to develop a truly accessible and 'British' mode of pictorial representation.

## I

Writing in the *Lloyd's Evening Post* of 1-3 May 1769, a critic singled out a series of works at the Royal Academy's first exhibition for having 'attracted the attention of the Connoisseurs'. The complete list read as follows:

...three by Sir Joshua Reynolds, viz. Diana disarming Cupid, Juno receiving the Cestus from Venus, and Hope nursing Love; The Departure of Regulus from Rome...and Venus lamenting the Death of Adonis, by Mr West; Hector and Andromache, Venus directing Aeneas and Achates, by Mrs Angelica [Kauffman]; The King and Queen, at full length, by Mr Dance-Holland; Lady Molyneux, by Mr Gainsborough; A Piping Boy, a Candle-light Piece and a Portrait of Master Angelo, by Mr Hone; An Altar-Piece of the Annunciation, by Mr Cipriani; The Character of Hebé, the Duke of Gloucester, and a Boy playing at Cricket, by Mr Cotes; A capital Landscape, containing a View in Penton Lynn, in Scotland, by Mr Barrett; and the Smith, described by Shakespeare in King John, *with open mouth, swallowing a Taylor's news*, by Mr Penny.<sup>100</sup>

As both Solkin and Hoock have noted, even the most cursory examination of this list gives a clear sense of the temper of the exhibition. Dominated by emphatically historical and allegorical works by Britain's foremost proponents of 'grand manner' painting – Reynolds, West, Kauffman, Cipriani – as well as grandiose full-length portraits of royal and aristocratic sitters by such luminaries as Nathaniel Dance-

<sup>100</sup> Cited in full in Solkin, *Painting for Money*, p. 266 and Hooke, *The King's Artists*, p. 207.

Holland and Francis Cotes, this was an exhibition that appears to fully bear out interpretations of the Academy as a bastion of classicism and cosmopolitanism.

Yet, at the end of the list we find a painting distinguished by its wholly different style and subject matter, ‘the Smith, described by Shakespeare in King John...by Mr Penny’. This work, which I shall refer to here as *The Blacksmiths* (fig. 13), operated as the clear antithesis of the ambitious Italianate works by which it was surrounded.<sup>101</sup> In place of gods and goddesses, Greek and Roman heroes, or glamorous aristocrats, we find a tailor approaching a group of blacksmiths at their forge—humble artisans whose cultural identity was defined by their industriousness and manual dexterity rather than their heroic virtue or social distinction. Whilst almost all the other major works cited in the *Lloyd’s* list are redolent of the ‘high’ traditions of ‘grand manner’ art, these characters embody the simple, the commonplace, even the crude.

Astonishingly, as the *Lloyd’s* list makes clear, this was not the work of an outsider, a marginal figure who had been afforded a place in the Academy’s exhibition as a condescending gesture towards the modes of practice that it had supposedly marginalised. Instead, this was the submission, the ‘performance’ – to use the contemporary term – of the Academy’s first Professor of Painting, the piece he had chosen in order to display his accomplishments to his peers and his public. For his Academy debut, then, Penny had submitted an exhibit that stood in stark contrast to the works of his most celebrated Academy colleagues.

Nor, in fact, was Penny’s painting the only exhibit to advance such an alternate, non-classical mode of imagery in the Academy’s first display. If we turn to examine the exhibition catalogue for 1769, we find a number of other exhibits that, similarly bypassing the ‘grand manner’ Italianate model central to the institution’s high-minded artistic programme, provide a close match with Penny’s work. Most obviously, two pictures which can be seen to have operated within this framework

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<sup>101</sup> Penny’s painting is more widely known as ‘The Gossiping Blacksmiths’, which is the title that was given to the image when it came to auction at Sotheby’s on 20 March 1963. The term ‘gossiping’, however, trivialises Penny’s striking scene, obscuring its aesthetic and cultural significance, and for this reason I have elected to refer to the artist’s submission simply as ‘The Blacksmiths’.

are those exhibited by the Vauxhall Gardens veteran, Francis Hayman.<sup>102</sup> Like Penny's painting, Hayman's *Don Quixote Disputing with the Mad Cardenio* (fig. 14) and *The Barber Reclaiming His Basin from Don Quixote* (fig. 15) constitute highly vernacular portrayals. This time, though, rather than dramatizing an overtly 'British' theme, Hayman took as his principal subject the popular literary work *The Ingenious Hidalgo Don Quixote of La Mancha* by the Spanish author Miguel de Cervantes. Whilst being hailed as a great literary classic that incorporated a host of serious philosophical ideas, Cervantes's narrative was predominantly comic in nature. Accordingly, and therefore in line with Penny's portrayal, Hayman focused exclusively on the 'low', comedic aspect of Cervantes's work.<sup>103</sup> Thus, his two submissions utilised an appropriately 'grotesque' form of imagery to visualise the two principal protagonists, pitching them as highly laughable bodily opposites. Whilst the fancy-struck, idealistic Don Quixote appears as a gangling, gaunt figure, his side-kick, the world-weary Sancho Panza, is corpulent and squat. It is also worth noting here that Hayman's second work, echoing Penny's portrayal of four humble tradesmen, features the comparably 'low' figure of a village barber. Penny's painting, then, left itself open to be bracketed with these two canvases to form a significant strand of non-classical imagery at the heart of the Academy's display.

Even the 'lowness' of Hayman's non-classical productions, however, appears to be surpassed by Penny's subject matter. Whereas Hayman's exhibits offered literal but elevated translations of their respective literary subjects, and thus essentially operated within the bounds of traditional history painting, Penny's submission – in accordance with the idea of visualising everyday life – took its cue from genre painting. More specifically, Penny can be seen to have exploited an established strand of 'low' Dutch imagery that similarly centralised the everyday, working figure of the blacksmith. Jan van Vliet's engraved view of *The Blacksmiths* (fig. 16) from 1635, for example, is one of many such prints that became widely collected in the period and that are likely to have provided Penny with the framework he needed for his own highly naturalistic picture. Not only does it depict a similar grouping of four

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<sup>102</sup> See item nos. 50-51 in *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy, MDCCLXIX: The First* (London, 1769), pp. 7, 14. Interesting summaries of Hayman's two works are to be found in Brian Allen, *Francis Hayman* (New Haven and London, 1987), pp. 118-19.

<sup>103</sup> Hayman apparently produced his original designs for these pieces as illustrations to Tobias Smollett's translation of Cervantes's text, published in two quarto volumes by Andrew Millar in March 1755; see Allen, *Francis Hayman*, p. 161.

workmen in a smithy, with a furnace in the background, but it displays a similar treatment of light and shade. The use of dramatic chiaroscuro was characteristic of Dutch art of the seventeenth century, and Vliet's work exemplifies this tradition. The probability of Dutch influence on Penny's image is still greater given that contemporary engravers were re-issuing these images too, as is suggested by James McArdell's print after Adriaen Brouwer's *The Blacksmith's Forge* (fig. 17) of c.1630, published in 1755-65. This strongly suggests that Penny was turning to a popular mode of imagery that was immediately recognisable to contemporary viewers as belonging to a 'low' visual tradition.<sup>104</sup> Penny's image, in fact, can be seen as a highly contemporary and localised reworking of the classic Dutch theme of the working forge.

While such a turn to 'low' Dutch imagery may have been unusual within the Academy, it was by no means unique within London's burgeoning exhibition culture. Penny's painting closely resembles the highly particularised imagery that had become a characteristic feature of the Society of Artists' exhibitions.<sup>105</sup> In particular, there are strong formal links with the 'candlelight' paintings that Joseph Wright of Derby produced from the mid-1760s onwards.<sup>106</sup> For instance, if we compare Penny's *The Blacksmiths* with Wright's well-known *Three Persons Viewing the Gladiator by Candlelight* (fig. 18), displayed at the Society's exhibition of 1765, we find that both artists contrived to produce the effect of a heavily darkened interior space where very little could be made out.<sup>107</sup> We even find Penny recapitulating one of the key technical innovations pioneered by Wright. In both pictures, the main light source – a candle in Wright's work and the blacksmiths' furnace in Penny's – is partially occluded by a foreground figure, ensuring that it does not distract from the strongly lit upper torsos and faces of the other characters.

<sup>104</sup> Interestingly, this print is also reproduced by Solkin in his article discussing the equivalent series of iron forge paintings that Joseph Wright of Derby produced between 1771 and 1773. Solkin, viewing Wright's five highly naturalistic but dignified scenes as extending the 'low' Dutch genre tradition, likewise cites Brouwer's image as a principal source for the younger artist's works. See David H. Solkin, 'Joseph Wright of Derby and the Sublime Art of Labor', *Representations*, no. 83 (summer 2003): 167-94.

<sup>105</sup> Solkin, *Painting for Money*, p. 267.

<sup>106</sup> For further accounts of Wright's 'candlelight' works from the 1760s, see Solkin, *Painting for Money*, pp. 214-46; chapter 2 of Benedict Nicolson, *Joseph Wright of Derby: Painter of Light* (New York and London, 1968), pp. 39-56; and Judy Egerton, *Wright of Derby*, exh. cat. (London, Tate Gallery, 1990), cat. nos. 14-18, 21-22.

<sup>107</sup> Wright's work is listed as item no. 163 in *A Catalogue of the Pictures...Exhibited by the Society of Artists of Great Britain at the Great Room in Spring-Garden, Charing-Cross, April the Twenty-Third, 1765* (London, 1765), p. 15.

No less pertinently, we find similarly intense light effects in the work of artists who did not always deal with Wright's respectably middle-class subject matter. Thomas Frye, for example, had earlier in the decade produced a series of highly naturalistic portraits of ordinary men and women that similarly exploited strong variations in light and shade; and, more critically, Henry Robert Morland had recently exhibited a number of comparable genre-style paintings of 'low' working figures such as laundresses and servant girls, likewise depicted by candlelight.<sup>108</sup> In particular, the latter's *Housemaid by Candlelight* (fig. 19), exhibited at the Society of Artists in 1765, can be seen to have provided a striking precedent for Penny's localised but visually-arresting composition.<sup>109</sup> Thus Penny's work, we can suggest, sought to perpetuate a strand of technically ingenious but 'low' imagery principally aligned with his former institution, the Society of Artists. In this sense, *The Blacksmiths* – appearing to contradict and thus disallow the Academy's high aesthetic ideals – can be seen as a highly unconventional, even subversive, performance.

Why would Penny have presented a piece that was so flagrantly at odds with the predilections and priorities of his most influential colleagues? How could such a painting take its place, seemingly without absurdity, amongst the classicising works on display at the Academy? And why would an artist who was one of the motive forces in the new institution's creation, submit a painting that, in subject matter and handling, more closely resembled the works that had been and continued to be amongst the most celebrated and characteristic productions of the artists who remained loyal to the Society of Artists?

To some extent, we can account for the characteristics of Penny's work – as well as those of Hayman – as an inevitable overhang from earlier practice, given the rapid and unexpected establishment of the Academy. There was less than six months between the crisis in the Society of Artists that led to Penny's resignation and the opening of the Academy's debut exhibition, leaving little time to design and execute an entirely new work. This was especially the case for Penny, given his prominent role in establishing the new institution. It is therefore to be expected that his first

<sup>108</sup> A number of Frye's portraits, which were primarily circulated as mezzotint engravings in the early 1760s, are reproduced and discussed in Nicolson, *Joseph Wright of Derby*; see esp. Frye's *Figure with Candle* from 1760, illustrated as fig. 48. On Frye's wider portrait practice, see Michael Wynne, 'Thomas Frye (1710-1762)', *Burlington Magazine*, vol. 114, no. 827 (February 1972): 78-85.

<sup>109</sup> Morland's image is listed as item no. 86 in *A Catalogue of the Pictures...Exhibited by the Society of Artists...April the Twenty-Third, 1765*, p. 10.

exhibition work would have been conceived in the very different circumstances that preceded his removal from the Society of Artists' vice-presidency. That this was indeed the case is confirmed by a signed and dated study for his painting, which shows that Penny had already begun work on the piece in 1767.<sup>110</sup> In fact, if we take the exploratory oil sketch (fig. 20) to represent the working-out of the final composition (the sketch offers a close precedent to the finished piece), we can confidently assume that Penny initiated his researches into the subject at an early stage, and certainly before any plans were laid to establish a Royal Academy.

Nevertheless, the fact still remains that Penny had chosen to display a work that emphatically denoted an earlier, specifically non-Academy phase of his career at the all-important opening exhibition of the new institution. To understand how and why Penny thought it possible, and perhaps even desirable, to exhibit such a work in the Academy's self-consciously dignified surroundings, we must attend far more closely to its form and meanings, beginning with the subject that Penny chose to represent.

Turning to the original 1769 exhibition catalogue, we find that Penny did not simply intend to depict a group of anonymous artisans, but to illustrate a passage from Shakespeare's celebrated historical play, *King John*:

I saw a smith with his hammer thus,  
The whilst his iron did on the anvil cool,  
With open mouth swallow a taylor's news.<sup>111</sup>

By using these lines, rather than a more straightforward descriptive title, Penny immediately emphasised to his viewers the importance of his literary source for understanding his artistic purposes. In doing so, he was almost certainly seeking to endow his apparently 'low' work with something of the playwright's cultural status, which was rapidly increasing at precisely this time.<sup>112</sup> In the decades before Penny exhibited his work, there had been a surge of interest in Shakespeare as one of the foremost representatives of British literary culture. This is evident from the

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<sup>110</sup> The study for Penny's painting is documented as having been sold by Christie's to the Fine Art Society on 9 October 1970 but its present whereabouts are now unknown.

<sup>111</sup> See item no. 87 in *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy, MDCCLXIX*, p. 10.

<sup>112</sup> For a stimulating general discussion of the significance of using Shakespeare as a subject at this time, see Ronald Paulson, *Book and Painting: Shakespeare, Milton and the Bible* (Knoxville, 1982), pp. 25-54. There is also a valuable discussion of the growth of the 'Shakespeare Cult' in Timothy Blanning, *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture: Old Regime Europe 1660-1789* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 310-13.

proliferation of newly published editions of the author's works that date from this period, as well as the numerous productions of his plays that were being staged across the capital. *King John*, in particular, was one of Shakespeare's most popular plays, having been performed more than forty times since the middle of the century.<sup>113</sup> No less significantly, the year that Penny exhibited his work was also the year of Garrick's celebrated Shakespeare Jubilee celebrations, held from 6-8 September 1769 at the playwright's birthplace, Stratford-upon-Avon. Garrick's event exemplified and greatly advanced Shakespeare's growing status as the supreme British playwright. Clearly, within this context, Shakespeare provided a suitably elevated point of literary, artistic and theatrical reference that allowed the artist to show the range and ambition of his learning.

In making such a move, Penny was not, of course, alone. Many artists before him had looked to Shakespeare as a national and patriotic author whose work offered narratives for a sophisticated but more than usually accessible kind of imagery. As early as 1728, Hogarth had produced a faintly humorous portrayal of *Falstaff Examining his Troops*, from *Henry IV, Part II*, while just less than two decades later, Hayman was commissioned to execute a series of Shakespearian works for the Prince of Wales's Pavilion at Vauxhall Gardens. These included dramatic historical scenes from *Hamlet* and *Henry V*, as well as such light-hearted and comedic scenes as *Falstaff in the Buck-Basket* from the playwright's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.<sup>114</sup> Even more significantly, Hayman had taken up *King John* (fig. 21) as part of his work on Sir Thomas Hanmer's famous edition of Shakespeare, published in 1743-44. Hayman's illustrative work for Hanmer's lavish multi-volume text, begun around 1741, presented the most extensive project of its kind, and exhibited a suitably high

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<sup>113</sup> For more on the individual performances of the play, see Stone (ed.), *The London Stage*, pt. 4, vols 1-3, passim. It is also worth noting that the public showing of Penny's work in April 1769 may have coincided with – or even prompted – the publication of an impressive new edition of Shakespeare's play by a consortium of London publishers. See *The Life and Death of King John: A Tragedy, Written by Shakespeare* (London, 1769).

<sup>114</sup> For more on the Shakespearian works produced by both of these artists, see Brian Allen, 'The Early Illustrations of Shakespeare', in Jane Martineau (ed.), *Shakespeare in Art* (London, 2003), pp. 49-51. Full descriptions of Hayman's Vauxhall productions are to be found in Anon., *A Description of Vaux-Hall Garden, Being a Proper Companion and Guide for All Who Visit that Place* (London, 1762), pp. 11-19, 31, 35. Also see Solkin, *Painting for Money*, pp.149-56 and Lawrence Gowing, 'Hogarth, Hayman, and the Vauxhall Decorations', *Burlington Magazine*, vol. 95, no. 598 (January 1953): 4-19.

level of stylistic sophistication.<sup>115</sup> This is exemplified in the artist's plate for *King John*, which skilfully evokes Shakespeare's dramatization of the tumultuous last years of King John's reign, when civil war led to the murder of John's heir apparent, Prince Arthur, the loss of England's Norman and Angevin possessions, a French invasion and ultimately, in legend if not in fact, the King's fatal poisoning. Depicting the play's final climactic scene, when the monarch is taken ill and dies before being able to meet the invading French army, Hayman's image consists of a complex multi-figural grouping centred upon the languishing King. The carefully defined reactions of the pictured protagonists to the tragic events which unfold before them create a complex but legible circuit of emotional response, endowing the image with a level of compositional and narrative complexity reminiscent of a large-scale historical work. With its highly-developed backdrop further contributing to the overall sense of grandeur, we can almost suggest that Hayman's determinedly elevated image succeeded in transforming the humble book illustration into a small-scale 'grand manner' work—an idea underscored by the image's ultra-refined mode of execution.<sup>116</sup>

Moreover, only the year before Penny exhibited his work, John Hamilton Mortimer took Hayman's example into the exhibition room with his *Scene from King John* (fig. 22), submitted to the Society of Artists' 1768 exhibition.<sup>117</sup> Following the basic template provided by Hayman's illustration, Mortimer's painting likewise pictures the final climactic episode from Shakespeare's play, though here we are shown the scene a few moments before John's death.<sup>118</sup> Rather than simply reworking Hayman's original formulation, however, Mortimer sought to heighten the affective impact of his work by drawing on the conventions of theatrical portraiture to improve the legibility and drama of his composition. Thus, aside from alluding to a

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<sup>115</sup> Hayman's designs for Hanmer are discussed in detail in Martineau (ed.), *Shakespeare in Art*, pp. 49-51 and W. M. Merchant, 'Francis Hayman's Illustrations of Shakespeare', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 9, no. 2 (spring 1958): 141-47. For a broad overview of the artist's collaboration with the publisher, see T. S. R. Boase, 'Illustrations of Shakespeare's Plays in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 10 (1947): 83-108.

<sup>116</sup> Hayman's design was engraved by the renowned French draughtsman Hubert Gravelot (1699-1773), who is known to have worked in London between 1732 and 1745. On Gravelot's general success as an engraver and designer, see Hammelmann, 'Shakespeare Illustration', esp. p. 144.

<sup>117</sup> See item no. 107 in *A Catalogue of the Pictures...Exhibited at the Great Room in Spring-Gardens, Charing-Cross, April the Twenty-Eighth, 1768, by the Society of Artists of Great Britain* (London, 1768), p. 8.

<sup>118</sup> For the identification of this scene, see John Sunderland, 'John Hamilton Mortimer: His Life and Works', *Walpole Society*, vol. 52 (1986): cat. no. 17.

recent performance of the play (which had been staged at Covent Garden in September 1767) and portraying three renowned actors – Robert Bensley, William Powell and Richard Smith – Mortimer, in the manner of Johann Zoffany, also placed great emphasis on recreating the dramatic gestures associated with these characters.<sup>119</sup> Whilst the artist's main protagonist, boldly positioned in the centre of the canvas, is shown clutching at his heart, his attendants, in turn, are pictured gesturing out of the picture space. In addition, Mortimer also cast his three protagonists within an ambitious exterior setting. Going one step further than Hayman, and almost rolling two different kinds of pictorial backdrop into one, Mortimer, to the left side of his canvas, portrayed part of the Cistercian Abbey where the main action of Shakespeare's final act was supposed to take place, whereas to the other side he pictured a battle being fought. Significantly, this enterprising artistic manoeuvre on the artist's part meant that his painting retained little trace of the original stage set and could therefore be seen to exist, in its own right, as a truly impressive historical painting. In other words, whilst presenting a faithful portrayal of a recent and highly popular stage performance, Mortimer's work also operated to evoke a grand historical narrative of national significance.

By utilising Shakespeare's *King John* as the central subject of his first Academy work, Penny was aligning his painting with an existing body of highly-esteemed imagery that exploited the same culturally resonant source. Its timing is also suggestively close to that of Mortimer's image, implying that both artists took inspiration from the same theatrical production. Nevertheless, however closely Penny's work can be linked to Hayman's and Mortimer's well known examples, his painting fundamentally sets itself apart from them. Most obviously, Penny's image is unambiguously contemporary in its presentation, making no attempt to render its characters in historical or even theatrical costume. This takes his image away from the heroic and historicising tradition referenced so clearly by Mortimer and Hayman and locates the scene firmly in the modern world. No less significantly, the passage that defines Penny's subject is remote from the main narrative of the play. Part of a dramatic exchange between the King and his attendant, Hubert de Burgh, the lines describe the chaos that, as a result of the King's rumoured murder of his nephew,

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<sup>119</sup> The particular performance referenced by Mortimer is documented in Stone (ed.), *The London Stage*, pt. 4, vol. 3, p. 1301. For more on Zoffany's evident influence on Mortimer and the artists' working relationship in general, see Sunderland, 'John Hamilton Mortimer', pp. 33-34.

Prince Arthur, and the imminent threat of invasion, was breaking out on the nation's streets.<sup>120</sup> Using nightmarishly vivid imagery, de Burgh describes how 'five moons' had been seen the previous night, an event taken by 'old men and beldams' as a terrifying omen. It is the spread of these rumours through London's populace that brings the blacksmiths' work to a halt. Penny's scene, then, relates to an off-stage action, and one, moreover, that sought to portray history through the mouths, ears and eyes of the common people. We can even suggest that Penny, by putting this work on display at the Academy in 1769, was self-consciously pitching his exhibit as a reply to Mortimer's image, dramatizing the supposed 'public' reaction to the momentous national events described in the latter's painting. The implication is that there were very different artistic – and iconographic – purposes at work in the two images. In order to bring Penny's own intentions into closer focus, we must now turn to consider in more depth the meaning of John's reign, both within Shakespeare's play and within eighteenth-century historical writing.

The historic figure John Lackland, the youngest son of the Plantagenet ruler Henry II and the central protagonist of Shakespeare's narrative, was widely known as the British monarch whose reign, running from 1199 to 1216, was marred by turbulence and defeat. During the seventeen years that he ruled, John's kingdom was constantly under threat of French invasion and wracked by civil strife, the latter of which resulted in the establishment of Magna Carta in 1215. This event, which saw the King concede a series of rights and privileges based on ancient Anglo-Saxon practice to his rebellious barons, has long been viewed as the beginning of English liberty, the first occasion on which the post-Conquest monarchy formally recognised that its subjects possessed fundamental rights that could not be alienated. The barons, however, were not the only ones in dispute with the King. John had also quarrelled incessantly with the Church, and, lending his reign a more sinister edge, he had reputedly gone as far as to have his nephew, Arthur, murdered in order to stop the young prince competing for the throne. This tragic action provides the central catalyst in Shakespeare's story for the final calamitous events leading to John's own untimely death.

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<sup>120</sup> For the whole speech from which Penny took his quotation, see E. A. J. Honigmann (ed.), *The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare: King John* (London, 1954), p. 106, lines 185-202.

John's reign was the subject of conflicting interpretations during the eighteenth century. On the one hand, there was a long tradition of representing it as an object-lesson in the appalling consequences of cruel and incompetent rule. The most recent and influential representative of this perspective was David Hume's celebrated *History of England*, completed in 1762. Hume devoted a whole chapter to John, discussing the King in the light of his various misdemeanours, particularly his failure to retain England's possessions in France and prevent French attack.<sup>121</sup> To this historian, the monarch was 'nothing but a complication of vices, equally mean and odious; ruinous to himself, and destructive to his people', who lost his extensive dominions through misrule.<sup>122</sup> In his view, the rebellion that led to Magna Carta was the legitimate response of the feudal elites to oppressive rule.

A rather different view was advanced by Paul de Rapin's older but equally popular history. Rapin saw John as having been as much, if not more, the victim of circumstance than the 'disposition to tyranny' described by Hume. 'During the whole course of his reign', wrote Rapin, 'he met with nothing but misfortunes, and those the most terrible, having to deal with three irreconcilable enemies, Philip Augustus king of France, pope Innocent III. and the barons of his own realm'.<sup>123</sup> Even though Rapin conceded that 'we must frame a very disadvantageous idea of him, when we consider his unjust proceedings', he went on to observe that 'if one had a mind to undertake his vindication on most of these articles, it would not perhaps be so difficult as it seems at first sight'. He further claimed that 'it evidently appears that the writers of his life have drawn him in blacker colours than he deserved', and even evinced scepticism about the legitimacy of Magna Carta as a defence of English liberties precisely because they were based on such ancient precedents: 'It is easy to see things were then upon a different foot, when it is considered, that there was necessity to recur to the time of the Saxon kings to find the foundations of these privileges'.<sup>124</sup>

Shakespeare's *King John* cannot be unproblematically assimilated to either Rapin or Hume's position. Instead, it fairly clearly presents its narrative within the tropes of

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<sup>121</sup> David Hume, *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688* (6 vols) (1754-62, London, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1762), vol. 2, pp. 40-101.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>123</sup> Paul de Rapin de Thoyras, *The History of England* (trans. N. Tindal) (12 vols) (London, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., 1757), vol. 2, p. 412.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 482.

tragedy: the King is constantly trapped by a seemingly ineluctable combination of circumstance and personality which combine to drive him inexorably to his fate. To that extent moral judgment on the monarch himself is to some degree suspended. But a moral is nevertheless very clear within the play itself. In the final scene, Robert Faulconbridge, the bastard son of King John's elder brother and predecessor, Richard II, declares that

This England never did, nor never shall,  
Lye at the proud foot of a Conqueror,  
But when it first did help to wound itself.<sup>125</sup>

The message is clear: that England will always be victorious except when internal dissent turns the country against itself.

What then, was Penny's purpose in making use of this moral at this time? Can it be seen as a plea for good kingship in the face of arbitrary royal actions, as a Humean reading might suggest? Or is its target instead the people themselves, the fractious and rebellious subjects who helped transform the reign of an imperfect king into a bloody and self-defeating tragedy, as a reading of Rapin might suggest? Or is it simply an abstract statement of principle that cannot be forced to fit a single interpretative context? To answer these questions we must look again, not at the textual source of Penny's painting, but at the image itself and its place within its broader visual, social and political contexts.

As we have already seen, one of the most distinctive features of Penny's image is its focus on a group of humble artisans. As long-standing members of Britain's burgeoning workforce, the tailor and the blacksmith, despite occupying the lowest strata of society, commanded considerable respect; and much can be found in contemporary literature describing the varying skills and duties that were ascribed to these figures. For instance, Robert Campbell's influential handbook *The London Tradesman* of 1747 offered lengthy accounts of each worker, detailing the typical conditions associated with their respective trades.<sup>126</sup> The tailor, according to Campbell's own Shakespearean imagery, qualified as someone who not only 'makes our Cloaths...but, in some measure, may be said to make [our]selves'; whereas the

<sup>125</sup> Honigmann (ed.), *King John*, p. 147, lines 112-14.

<sup>126</sup> See Robert Campbell, *The London Tradesman* (London, 1747), pp. 177-83, 190-94.

blacksmith was described as requiring a ‘mechanic head’, for, as the author explained, the working arrangements within a blacksmith’s shop were complex:

In all Smith’s Shops [the workmen] are divided into three classes; the Fire-Man, or he that forges the Work; the Vice-Man, or he who files and finishes it; and the Hammer Man, who strikes with the great Hammer by the Direction of the Fire-Man, who uses only a small Hammer.<sup>127</sup>

The same vision of a prosperous and hardworking artisan class was also present in wider visual culture. It is perhaps best epitomised in Hogarth’s *Beer Street* (fig. 23) of 1751, an overtly celebratory vision of hardy and contented Englishmen hard at work on their respective trades.<sup>128</sup> An anonymous pamphlet, *A Dissertation on Mr Hogarth’s Six Prints Lately Published*, also issued in 1751, enthusiastically declared that

the People have healthy wholesome looks...the Men are hale and robust...every Body seems busy and merry in their various Trades and Occupations; some are singing, some laughing and joking among themselves, all with good Humour in their Faces, and industrious in their Business.<sup>129</sup>

The hale and hearty individuals in this print, then, are contented with their lot and thus contribute happily to the nation’s prosperity. Indeed, even relaxation and refreshment – in the form of indulgence in the nation’s favoured liquor, beer – serve primarily to enhance the ability to work. As the same *Dissertation* aptly explained:

At Intervals, when a little fatigued with Labour and the Heat of the Day, the full Joram goes round, which gives new Spirits, and a Refreshment which trickles thro’ every Vein of them, by which they feel themselves comforted, and fresh Vigour and Strength added to go on with their Work to the End of the Day.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.180, 191.

<sup>128</sup> Besides featuring a blacksmith, Hogarth’s work also included the everyday working figures of the butcher and paviour. For a stimulating discussion of this image and its equally famous sequel, *Gin Lane*, see Mark Hallett, *Hogarth* (London, 2000) pp. 222-26.

<sup>129</sup> Anon., *A Dissertation on Mr Hogarth’s Six Prints Lately Published*, viz. ‘Gin Lane’, ‘Beer Street’, and the ‘Four Stages of Cruelty’ (London, 1751), p. 29.

<sup>130</sup> Anon., *A Dissertation*, p. 29.

Thus fortified, it seems, there was no limit to the ‘vigour and strength’ of the native artisan, who could work his long day to the close without flagging or failing, provided he could enjoy appropriate sustenance.

Penny’s painting sets up a complex set of relations with this kind of imagery. To begin with, it is notable that Penny’s Hammer-Man on the right can be seen to possess considerable strength and a kind of straightforward or honest ‘Roast Beef’ manliness. In this sense, Penny’s painting coheres wholeheartedly with Hogarth’s similarly robust portrayal of the smith as well as the description of hale-and-hearty artisans found in the early pamphlet. Moreover, the still-life in the foreground of Penny’s image, comprising what appears to be the crumpled page of a newspaper and two discarded beer flagons, sets up another direct link with Hogarth’s print. The blacksmith and his assistant, we are made to imagine, paused only moments before to revive their flagging spirits with a pint of beer so that they could return to their labours with renewed enthusiasm. In Penny’s image, however, the enthusiastic labour of *Beer Street* is not sustained but interrupted, as the Fire-Man pauses to hear the tailor’s news. Careless of his labours, as Shakespeare’s words tell us, the iron cools on the anvil and becomes unworkable. British prosperity, then, has been put at risk by the workmen’s encounter with the rumours and gossip that swirl around them. In contrast, then, to the healthy consumption of news symbolised by the crumpled newspaper – which in its turn recalls the copy of the *Daily Gazetteer* held by the jovial looking man pictured on the left of Hogarth’s *Beer Street* – we have its pernicious opposite. Lurking within Penny’s image, it therefore seems, is a negative counterpart to the industrious ideal, just as Hogarth’s own image had its antithesis in the drunken disorder of *Beer Street*’s companion plate, *Gin Lane*.

This reading of the image is further reinforced by comparing the use of emotion and facial expression across Hogarth’s and Penny’s images. As we have seen, the early account of Hogarth’s plate took great pains to single out the varying facial expressions of the characters as a key to understanding the ‘low’ but joyous scenario depicted. Penny’s painting displays a similar concern with visualising the psychological states of its characters, but to very different effect. The chain of reactions upon which Penny’s narrative hinges is not merely confined to bodily movements but also includes the varying countenances of the individual characters portrayed. Indeed, starting with the half-shadowed though highly animated face of

the tailor, we get a clear sense of his barely contained excitement as he regales the other men with the news he has just heard. Next, moving towards the centre of the composition, we find that the tailor's excited agitation gives way to the stunned surprise, running into fear, of the principal blacksmith who stares back at the other workman wide-eyed and open-mouthed, as he absorbs the startling news. From here, in turn, our gaze is finally channelled to the more stoical figure at the far right of the canvas, who, calmly surveying the proceedings, appears fully resigned to the tailor's persistent rumour-mongering. Aside from setting up a close link with Shakespeare's description of the blacksmith 'with open mouth, swallowing a taylor's news', Penny's image, it would seem, presents a decidedly unflattering image of the effects of the workmen's participation in the exchange of gossip.

This begins to offer the key to locating Penny's image in its world. As is made apparent by the urgent and whispered exchange that characterises the closely-huddled figures, Penny's protagonists do not merely discuss everyday work-related matters. Rather, these ordinary tradesmen are shown partaking in an imagined political discussion, an activity that would almost certainly have tied Penny's painting to the wider debate about politics and lower class society taking place at the time he produced his image.<sup>131</sup> Remarkably, this fractious dispute, ongoing since the early 1760s, centred upon the actions of a single man—the highly controversial John Wilkes, who, combining the roles of politician and journalist, had spearheaded a campaign to reform the English constitution and take politics outside of Parliament.<sup>132</sup> Starting in April 1763 with the libellous satire he published on the King's anti-war speech in issue 45 of the *North Briton*, Wilkes, intent on gaining both the freedom of the press and the right of voters to determine their representatives, subjected Bute's much-hated ministry to a series of highly public polemical attacks which quickly earned him fame as an ambassador of the people and of the nation's liberty. Wilkes was now supported by a growing mass of urban

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<sup>131</sup> On the broader link between contemporary politics and the Academy's perceived exclusivity, see Solkin, *Painting for Money*, pp. 262-66.

<sup>132</sup> Solkin discusses Wilkes's specific role in this political controversy in *ibid.*, pp. 262-65 and within the revised version of his article 'The Battle of the Ciceros: Richard Wilson and the Politics of Landscape in the Age of John Wilkes', in Simon Pugh (ed.), *Reading Landscape: Country-City-Capital* (Manchester, 1990), pp. 41-65. For more on Wilkes's political career in general, see George Rudé, *Wilkes and Liberty* (Oxford, 1962); James T. Boulton, *The Language of Politics in the Age of Wilkes and Burke* (London and Toronto, 1963), esp. pp. 34-44; and John Brewer, *Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George III* (Cambridge, 1976).

labourers, and even some of London's middling citizens, and the capital's streets soon rang out with the cries of the first 'Wilkes and Liberty' mobs. The situation deteriorated dramatically in late 1768, however, when Wilkes was finally confined to the King's Bench Prison and his membership of the Commons withdrawn. A wave of mob violence followed, culminating in the Middlesex Election crisis of the following March, when Wilkes, elected no fewer than three times to stand as a member for the county, was ingloriously unseated by Parliament—a series of events followed by the greatest civil unrest the city had seen in decades. Strikingly, many of the riotous scenes were promptly captured in print and, as we see from such images as *The Battle of Temple Bar* (fig. 24) and *Sequel to the Battle of Temple Bar* (fig. 25), published in the *London Magazine*, those members of the public who appeared to be at the forefront of the violence were the same kinds of individual that Penny featured in his painting.

Indeed, by the early 1760s, both the blacksmith and the tailor, despite their long-established standing as tradesmen, had come to be viewed as highly problematic figures. As a further set of contemporary satires reveal, both types of workman were increasingly condemned as vulgar mischief-makers who readily stepped outside the accepted limits of their respective professions to engage in pursuits of a dubious and troubling nature.<sup>133</sup> One such pictorial attack was that provided by Bartholomew Warren's frontispiece (fig. 26) to Thomas Legg's *Low Life* of 1764, an extended account of the differing activities typically undertaken by high- and low-class Londoners in the twenty-four hours between any Saturday night and Monday morning. Clearly playing to prevailing stereotypes, Warren's image – focusing on the latter half of London society – depicted several labourers and tradesmen, including the ubiquitous blacksmith (pictured as a bared-armed, stout figure) and tailor (shown holding shears in one hand and a pack of cards in the other), together with a shoemaker, a butcher and a painter (all with the associated tools of their trade), taking Monday as a holiday and neglecting their work for private pleasures. Significantly, all of Warren's depicted figures were characterised by an obvious lack of refinement that immediately marked them out as indolent low-born men. Besides being shown overindulging in a number of licentious entertainments (drinking,

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<sup>133</sup> For the following discussion of how later satirists portrayed these figures, I am indebted to John Brewer's highly stimulating essay *The Common People and Politics 1750-1790s* (Cambridge, 1986).

whoring, gambling), each individual was given exaggeratedly coarse features and an ungainly bearing. As contemporary viewers would not have failed to notice, these figures did not merely look, they appeared to ogle, leer and stare with an unashamed, open-mouthed credulity that set up an explicit contrast with the disapproving gentleman who could be seen passing by the open window.

But above these uncultured social practices, and even more disconcertingly, these figures – as another, slightly earlier, pictorial satire (fig. 27) from March 1763 shows – were also seen to be assuming an increasingly central political role, involving themselves in key demonstrations and debates that belied their humble social origins. Picturing a multitude of different citizens, from low and high tradesmen to women with children, gathered in a London street and remonstrating avidly about the shortcomings of Bute's government, this unabashedly candid print, unambiguously entitled *The Politicians*, aimed to cast a wholly negative light on the growing interest in politics shown by persons of all ranks—a point further underlined by the derisive lines of text accompanying the image: 'Britannia's sons of all conditions/Amazing! now are Politicians/Bards, Parsons, Lawyers and Physicians/ E'en low Mechanicks too pretend/To rail at what they cannot mend...'. Strikingly, not only was the figure of the blacksmith made central to this sardonic portrayal (notice how, once again, the same stock type – bared arms, coarse features, pliers in hand – was used to denote this particular figure), but the equally infamous tailor, his hands nonchalantly placed in his pockets, was shown conversing with a barber to the right of the image. The same ludicrous view of each tradesman was also advanced by two engraved images published in 1768, John Dixon's *The Ludicrous Operator, or Blacksmith Turn'd Tooth Drawer* (fig. 28) and Thomas Stayner's *A Taylor Riding to Brentford* (fig. 29). Again, both prints, using the two workmen as the focus of an unmistakably comic imagery, sought to attack the social and political aspirations of these humble figures: the blacksmith for attempting to perform a highly specialised and potentially risky task – that of pulling out a woman's front tooth – far beyond his professional capability; and the tailor for abandoning his work to ride to a local election in the hope of satisfying his radical leanings. In the case of the latter image especially, the 'low' workman, to judge by his apparent unsteadiness and the fact that he was shown carrying a riding manual for beginners (entitled 'Rules for Bad Horsemanship') in his pocket, was clearly heading for a significant fall. There can be little doubt that

these coarse featured and ungainly individuals were laughably unqualified to pursue any duty outside of their own respective trades and occupations.

Significantly, we find comparable traces of satire within Penny's work. In line with all four prints, the artist strongly exaggerates both the bodily posture and facial expression of the principal blacksmith. Not only is this character given a gaping, credulous look but he is also shown indecorously thrusting his head forward – in an almost violent manner – towards the tailor. As such, the artist's portrait of the blacksmith overwhelmingly promotes this figure as someone lacking all social grace and, by extension, the capacity to reason. Moreover, Penny repeats the same formula in his representation of the tailor. Again, we are made to notice the corresponding clownishness of this figure, and especially his stooped, awkward posture and coarse ruddiness. Brusquely commanding the attention of the other tradesmen, he too appears to lack refinement and any real understanding.

That Penny did, in fact, self-consciously seek to connect his work to these lower status images and the controversial political material they contained, can be ascertained from another print which appeared on the market shortly after the artist's painting went on display at the Academy. John Finlayson's unmistakably 'low' satiric formulation (fig. 30), clearly conceived as a response to the artist's exhibit, not only presented a close reworking of the other painter's arresting figural grouping (likewise showing two blacksmiths being interrupted in their work by a raucous tailor) but was also suggestively entitled *The Newsmongers*—an overt reference to contemporary politics and the ongoing controversy surrounding low-born activists. Further underlining this contentious association, when Penny's painting was itself issued as a mezzotint engraving in January 1771 it was given the uncompromising title *The English Politicians* (fig. 31). This engraving, in its turn, seems to have inspired another, more literal, reworking of Penny's image for more popular consumption. As we can infer from its title, *The Blacksmith Lets his Iron Grow Cold Attending to the Taylor's News* (fig. 32), this anonymous plate from 1772 can be directly connected with Penny's Shakespearean scene. In this case, however, Penny's political subtext is made wholly explicit by the details that the engraver has added to the print. Not only does the tailor appear bearing a pair of enormous shears to denote his occupation, he grasps and points to a similarly outsize newspaper. The

blacksmiths' forge, meanwhile, displays on its wall a just recognisable plate of Wilkes himself.

Penny's *The Blacksmiths* was therefore immediately comprehensible to contemporaries as a sidelong comment on the dangerous consequences of the unwonted – and, from the point of view of most of their social superiors, unwanted – incursion into the public realm of an increasingly opinionated working populace. To some degree, the alacrity with which Penny's imagery was absorbed into this strand of contemporary political discourse was fortuitous. Wilkes returned from exile in France only two months before the painting was exhibited and, almost immediately afterwards, began campaigning to secure a parliamentary seat, first for the City of London elections on 25 March 1768 and then, only a few days later, for the County of Middlesex. But such events would have reinforced, rather than fundamentally redefined, Penny's intended political meanings.

With a more secure sense of *The Blacksmiths*' contemporary signification we can now reconsider its role within Penny's quest for identity within the Academy, as well as its critical reception. At one level, certainly, Penny's image operated in relation to a series of archetypally 'vulgar' and popular strands of imagery. With its sharply defined treatment of light and shade, its particularised depiction of contemporary life, and its choice of a smith's forge as its subject, Penny's image set up clear resonances with the 'low' Dutch genre tradition that was growing in appeal in precisely this period. By that very means, *The Blacksmiths* also asserted its affinity with the characteristic imagery of the Society of Artists, as well as with a minority strand within the Academy's own exhibits. In both respects, it appears remote from the kind of classicising iconography that might be expected of the new institution's first Professor of Painting.

Nevertheless, Penny's exhibit can also be seen as a work that, in spite of the low associations of its subject matter, aligned itself with higher cultural values. The artist's work, we should remember, not only drew upon a key literary text but also memorialised a central period of British history. It thus took its place as an ardently nationalistic production that, in line with the national mission for artistic reform bestowed by the King upon the Academy, sought to promote a distinctly 'British' aesthetic as an alternative to the Continental modes that remained dominant in

eighteenth-century elite culture. It also emphatically operated to enforce the traditional social and political order, and aligned itself even more closely with the ethos of structured reform that was intrinsic to the Academy's existence as a royal institution. This painting, then, was indubitably the work of an establishment man who was inclined, by temper and not simple self-interest, to the hierarchical principles of the Academy.

Even more importantly, *The Blacksmiths* is a work that situates itself not only in the tradition of Dutch imagery embodied in the work of Vliet and others, but also in a longer tradition of imagery of the forge which, rooted in Italian and Spanish art, took its cue from works by Antonio Tempesta and Giorgio Vasari. For Penny's image is in fact a witty and self-conscious reference to Diego Velázquez's *The Forge of Vulcan* (fig. 33) from c.1630.<sup>134</sup> The poses of Penny's Fire-man and Hammer-man form an almost literal borrowing from the corresponding figures in Velázquez's work, the Hammer-man standing straight on the right and the Fire-man hunched over his work in the centre, his face turning to address the unexpected visitor on the left. Whilst the individual figures are thoroughly reworked and redrawn, there can be little doubt that Penny's composition derives directly from this most unusual – in the context of eighteenth-century British art – source. The direct borrowing ceases, however, in the third figure of the group. In the place where the Spanish artist situated the almost effeminately refined figure of Apollo announcing the unfaithfulness of Vulcan's wife Venus, we find the ludicrous figure of the breathless tailor. Both come to give news, but one from the realm of the Gods and the other from the street. Penny has therefore wholly subverted the meaning of Velázquez's image, creating its satirical opposite. This was almost certainly not a level of signification that Penny expected his viewers to decode: Spanish painting was still little known in England at this point and active collecting was restricted almost entirely to Murillo, Ribera and Zurbarán.<sup>135</sup> Nevertheless, it offers a striking insight into the breadth of examples on which Penny drew in constructing his works, as well as his willingness to transform the meaning of those examples to meet the demands of his own quite different purposes.

<sup>134</sup> I am indebted to Jeanne Nuechterlein for bringing this parallel to my attention.

<sup>135</sup> See Nigel Glendinning and Hilary Macartney (eds), *Spanish Art in Britain and Ireland, 1750-1920. Studies in Reception* (Woodbridge, 2010), esp. pp. 4-5 and 17-18, and ch. 5, 'Collectors of Spanish Paintings', pp. 44-63.

For all its political conformism and elevated references, however, Penny's image was not entirely reassuring in the message it conveyed to contemporary viewers. For, even whilst the piece, in referencing Shakespeare's *King John*, advanced a historically and culturally resonant theme, it must also have appeared that the figures of the blacksmith and the tailor had been directly transplanted by Penny from one of the many related pictorial satires in circulation. With his newest exhibit, in other words, Penny was visualising history through the prism of genre whilst steering remarkably close to a crude and popular form of graphic urban imagery.

It is therefore unsurprising that at least some of Penny's contemporaries found this a difficult image to appreciate within the context of the new Royal Academy. One critic, remembering Penny's exhibit and writing in the later pamphlet *Observations on the Pictures Now in Exhibition at the Royal Academy* (published in 1771), appears to have found viewing the painting at the Academy's inaugural show a particularly unsavoury experience. Whilst remarking that 'the figures are correctly drawn; the picture...well coloured, [having] a very tolerable effect in regard to light-and-shadow', this viewer was also quick to point out that:

Two of [the figures'] countenances are, however, exceptionable. That of the Taylor is very much so. The painter has made his face disgustingly ugly, and there is no looking at it without pain. Ugliness...is false humour. He might have given his taylor all the nincompoop character that we commonly ascribe to taylors...without making him at all ugly. The smith likewise in his surprise opens his eyes so as to discover the whole iris; which gives a ghastliness to his countenance. The painter might have contrived an equally strong expression of surprise, that should not at all have shocked the spectator.<sup>136</sup>

Clearly, not possessing the instant visual appeal of *Wolfe* or *Granby*, Penny's newest work was chiefly judged in terms of its markedly caricatured, even grotesque portrayal of the two principal protagonists. As the critic's comments make clear, the propriety of Penny's painting was undercut for some viewers by its heavily exaggerated and thus shocking portrayal of the principal character and his ugly, 'nincompoop' adversary—its too bold reliance, in other words, on highly

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<sup>136</sup> [R. Barker], *Observations on the Pictures Now in Exhibition at the Royal Academy, Spring Gardens, and Mr Christies* (London, 1771), pp. 9-10.

differentiated, localised forms. Even the upright, overtly ‘heroic’ figure of the blacksmith’s assistant to the right of the image, could not, it appears, distract from the stooping, inelegant personages that were seen to dominate Penny’s canvas.

Can we, therefore, view this image as a troublingly unresolved or ambivalent work? Perhaps Penny, for this first Academy exhibition, simply gauged the conditions incorrectly. The artist was, after all, negotiating a completely new institutional environment, one very different in character (or seemingly so) to the space he and his colleagues had just left. What, at any rate, is clear from this reading of Penny’s *The Blacksmiths* is that the artist’s painting constituted a complex borderline image. In pushing his subject beyond accepted limits to offer a kind of political satire – a product more in keeping with the heterogeneous spaces of the Society of Artists and Vauxhall Gardens – the artist had unwittingly misjudged the tastes of the more fastidious among the Academy’s exhibition audience. Crucially, however, Penny appears to have realised his mistake, for his next Academy performance signalled a conscious decision to produce something more in line with the new institution’s elevated aesthetic agenda.

## II

Penny’s second Academy exhibit, *Imogen Discovered in the Cave* (fig. 34), would initially appear to have been conceived with a similar goal to that of its predecessor. Not only did this newest work reference *Cymbeline*, a highly popular Shakespearian narrative that, like *King John*, had been performed extensively throughout the capital’s playhouses (over sixty times in the previous decade alone), but, once again, the piece also drew on a subject that was deeply redolent of British history.<sup>137</sup> Shakespeare’s play, based on an ancient legend concerning the early Celtic king Cymbeline or Cunobelinus, tells the story of how this ruler’s fabled court succeeded in defeating an attempted Roman invasion, inaugurating a new era of order and

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<sup>137</sup> For the individual performances of the play over this period, see Stone (ed.), *The London Stage*, pt. 4, vols 2-3, pp. 905-1364.

peace between the ancient British nation and the Imperial capital.<sup>138</sup> Alongside this, the playwright's text also chronicles what can be described as the domestic plight of the King's only daughter and the play's central heroine, Imogen, who, wrongly accused by her husband Posthumus of committing adultery, flees the court in fear for her life. Instructed by Posthumus's sympathetic servant, Pisano, to disguise herself as a boy, Imogen retires to a secluded cave on the west coast of Wales, where she befriends 'Polydore' and 'Cadwal' who, unbeknown to her, are really her own long-lost brothers, Guiderius and Arviragus. The two young princes had been brought to the site by Belarius, an elderly nobleman who, as we learn, was unfairly banished from Cymbeline's court twenty years before and in retaliation kidnapped the princes to deprive the King of his heirs. Still living with Belarius, they lead the simple, unworldly lives of primitive hunters. Both young men, nevertheless, are seen to possess an innate stateliness that accords with their royal origins and, with this, a natural zeal for combat. Tiring of their rustic fastness, they join Cymbeline's army in its battle against the Romans, and turn certain defeat to a victory that brings about the court's recovery and, with it, the play's resolution.

Taking as its focus a pivotal episode in Shakespeare's narrative, *Imogen Discovered in the Cave* depicts the moment, from Act 3, Scene 7, when Guiderius and Arviragus, accompanied by Belarius, are shown seized with astonishment at the cave's mouth as they discover the play's heroine hiding inside their meagre dwelling. Thus, the artist directly echoed Belarius's memorable lines as he seeks to delay his adoptive sons' entry to the cave, 'Stay, come not in/ But that it eats our victuals, I should think/ Here were a fairy', and further contrived to show the startled Imogen, no less astonished than her discoverers, within the darkened confines of the cave.<sup>139</sup> In this way, Penny can once again be seen to have selected a scene replete with human emotion and incident, sustaining the interest in such subject matter evident in *The Blacksmiths*.

Moreover, by taking another famous Shakespearian play as the central subject of his second piece, Penny once again tied his Academy exhibit to an existing body of imagery that utilised the same textual source. *Cymbeline* had recently been the

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<sup>138</sup> For more on the historical background to Shakespeare's work, see J. M. Nosworthy (ed.), *The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare: Cymbeline* (London, 1955), pp. xvii-xxix.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116, lines 12-13.

subject of a major exhibition submission in the form of Robert Edge Pine's portrait of the actor Samuel Reddish in the character of Posthumus (fig. 35). This impressive full-length painting, exhibited together with Mortimer's *King John* at the Society of Artists' spring show of 1768, portrayed the penultimate scene from the play's final act, when Posthumus, having been mistaken for a Roman warrior, is taken prisoner by two British captains.<sup>140</sup> Like Mortimer's Shakespearian submission, Pine's painting was concerned to capture the likeness of a well-known stage actor in a familiar theatrical role—Reddish's first appearance as Posthumus at Drury Lane in October 1767. At the same time, it is apparent that the artist was concerned to produce a painting that presented more than just an accurate character likeness. In line with Mortimer's portrayal, Pine clearly went to great pains to visualise, in 'non-stage' terms, the military encampment to the rear of his protagonist. Translating the action from the realm of theatre to that of ancient history, this strategy ensured that his exhibit could be read not only as a theatrical portrait but as a legitimate historical work. In its combination of dramatic gesture and historicising setting, Pine's image further recalled Hogarth's similarly dramatic depiction of *David Garrick as Richard III* from 1745, reinforcing its status as an authentically 'British' variant of historical art as well as a vivid depiction of a celebrated actor.<sup>141</sup>

Of greater direct relevance to Penny's image, however, is Hayman's earlier illustration of the play (fig. 36), again produced for Hanmer's edition of Shakespeare. Not only does this depict the same pivotal scene, but it likewise presents a comparable multi-figural composition centred upon a closely-grouped trio of protagonists. As in Penny's painting, these characters are captured re-entering the scene after an imagined day's hunting, with the darkened cave entrance framing the disguised figure of Imogen to one side of the picture. The poses of the two princes in Hayman's image and those of Belarius and his nearby son in Penny's work are closely related, while the different figures depicted by both artists are linked by their

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<sup>140</sup> Pine's exhibit is listed as item no. 126 in *A Catalogue of the Pictures...Exhibited at the Great Room in Spring-Garden, Charing-Cross, April the Twenty-Eighth, 1768, by the Society of Artists*, p. 9. There appears to be a discrepancy between the Society of Artists' description of Pine's portrait as showing 'Mr Reddish, in the character of Posthumus, in Cymbeline, Act the Fifth, Scene the Last' and the actual scene represented by the artist's work. Pine's painting, it seems to me, forms a closer match with Posthumus's first highly dramatic speech of Act 5, Scene 4, beginning 'Most welcome bondage; for thou art a way, I think to liberty' (line 4) than with the action that follows in the final act, revolving as it does around the whole cast coming together to resolve their differences and reinstate Cymbeline's court.

<sup>141</sup> For the dual status of Hogarth's work, see Hallet and Riding, *Hogarth*, p. 204.

carefully observed reactions to each other. Hayman's Imogen is shown standing with one hand clasped to her breast and the other extended outwards in an attitude of gentle apology, foreshadowing the open stance of Penny's corresponding figure. The princes, in their turn, are similarly depicted by both artists: starting back in amazement, their arms are raised in alarm at the sight of the strange figure before them. There are further parallels between Penny's treatment and Hayman's in the fine detail of their images. One of Hayman's two princes carries a bow and sheath of arrows and the other a sword, and this iconography is exactly replicated in Penny's work. These correspondences confirm that Penny looked to the earlier artist's image when working out his own portrayal of the same scene.

Once more, we can therefore suggest, Penny, rather than gambling with an unknown subject, had carefully sought out, just as he had done a year before, a highly popular literary source for his latest work. Already aligned with two highly influential images, he clearly hoped that the popular and critical success of his own representation would be assured. Yet, just as in the case of his previous exhibit, Penny's newest formulation, whilst forming a decisive link with Pine's and – especially – Hayman's representations of *Cymbeline*, simultaneously defined itself against these other pieces. Pine's image, for example, although incorporating a number of identifiable 'grand manner' elements, nevertheless remained rooted within the conventions of theatrical portraiture rather than exploring, on a more general level, the meaning of Shakespeare's play.<sup>142</sup> Indeed, Penny's *Imogen Discovered in the Cave*, in opposition to Pine's work, hinges not upon the accurate likeness of a well-known stage actor or actress but upon the generalised portrayal of a cast of fictional characters. Penny therefore went significantly beyond Pine in his determination to imbue his image with the qualities of a full-blown historical work.

In its determination to emphasise the historical character of its subject, Penny's image is far more in accord with Hayman's strikingly refined, artistically ambitious illustration. Even here, however, there are significant differences. Although both depict the same moment in Shakespeare's storyline, Penny makes several notable changes to the figural sequence presented by Hayman. Thus, rather than picturing Belarius as the pivotal figure who, leading the way back to the cave, comes upon

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<sup>142</sup> For more on the particular performance referenced by Pine, see Stone (ed.), *The London Stage*, pt. 4, vol. 3, p. 1282.

Imogen first and then orders his companions to ‘Stay, come not in’, Penny portrayed one of his adoptive sons in the corresponding position, placing the older protagonist behind him in an exaggeratedly stooped pose. This suggests that, however much Belarius may seek to prevent the encounter (notice how his hand is placed firmly on the first prince’s arm to restrain him), it marks the beginning of his eclipse as a result of the three siblings’ reunion. Not only does this bold reworking of Hayman’s composition enhance the visual potency of Penny’s image as a whole, allowing the artist to create a more distinct pathway into and through the picture (starting with the figure of the second prince at the left, our gaze is directed across the line of male characters and into the cave at the far right), but it also means that the actual focus of the scene – which in the earlier artist’s work is split more equally between the group of male characters and Shakespeare’s heroine – becomes more complex. The foreground figure group is dominant in scale, but the preponderance of gazes directs our attention to Imogen. We are thus invited to pause and consider the startled female at length but, aided by the half-turned dog at the cave entrance, are led back to contemplate the trio of male figures. In effect, Penny goes beyond the single dramatic moment visualised by Hayman to simultaneously express two critical strands of the story: the unexpected encounter between the three huntsmen and Imogen and the growing realisation that the eldest huntsman’s two companions are in fact the latter’s own kin. Like his first Academy exhibit, therefore, the artist’s second submission, rather than relying wholeheartedly upon the pictorial template advanced by a senior figure such as Hayman, transforms it to enhance its visual and affective impact.

Penny’s transformation of Hayman’s model is significantly enhanced by the recurrence in his latest work of the emphatic chiaroscuro that played such an important role in *The Blacksmiths*. This can once again be linked to Wright of Derby, who, only a year before, had exhibited a painting at the Society of Artists with clear formal and narrative parallels to Penny’s work. Wright’s painting, the first of his outdoor candlelight scenes, depicts two young explorers discovering an elderly hermit or philosopher contemplating human bones in a lamp-lit cave (fig. 37). Similarly, in Penny’s work the cave becomes a source of darkness that fills the whole right-hand side of the image. Imogen then appears within it in a pool of bright light, reinforcing the emphasis upon her in much the same way that the illumination

in Wright's composition makes the philosopher its central focus. Penny, it seems, had actively appropriated elements from Wright's image, taking the self-consciously naturalistic motif of discovery in a remote cave and shaping it to meet his own ends.<sup>143</sup>

Penny's image also possesses something of the broader cultural resonance of the other artist's work. Wright's piece, with its philosopher contemplating a human skeleton – symbolising both natural perfection of design and inevitable mortality – is arguably some kind of meditation on the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom.<sup>144</sup>

Penny, too, by dramatizing his ancient theme, can also be said to have connected his work with a wider intellectual culture, this time of antiquarianism and thus the idea of unearthing or newly discovering a past world.<sup>145</sup> The longstanding antiquarian concern to gather knowledge about ancient civilisations had lately extended to the study of the British Isles, prompting, as Rosemary Sweet has shown, an increasing number of scholars to begin studying the material remains of Britain's different pasts as a means of tracing back the lineage of the nation and thereby establishing its earliest history and origins.<sup>146</sup> With the appearance of such publications as William Stukeley's *Palaeographia Britannica or Discourses on Antiquities of Britain* of 1742 operating to inscribe a growing sense of British nationhood, there was now a palpable desire amongst the 'polite' public to see the antiquities of Britain set beside those of Rome. By looking back to one of the earliest recorded phases of Celtic history and therefore to what could perceptibly be termed the nation's very beginnings, Penny, in his newest Academy exhibit, was essentially doing just this: visualising an equivalent British antiquity that was open to every discerning spectator for discovery. In this sense, the artist, just as he can be seen to have done with his first work, was self-consciously enhancing the patriotic and topical appeal of his painting.

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<sup>143</sup> Little has been written on Wright's intriguing work, which evidently remained unsold until the artist's posthumous sale in May 1801. For a brief but useful summary of the picture, see Egerton, *Wright of Derby*, pp. 91-92.

<sup>144</sup> This view, advanced by Benedict Nicholson, has been disputed by subsequent scholars but, in my view, remains plausible; for a useful summary of the debate, see *ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> On the rise of antiquarianism in this period, see Rosemary Sweet, *Antiquaries: The Discovery of the Past in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, London and New York, 2004, esp. pp.1-30; *idem*, 'Antiquaries and Antiquities in Eighteenth-Century England', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 34, no. 2 (winter 2001): 181-206; and Martin Myrone and Lucy Peltz (eds), *Producing the Past: Aspects of Antiquarian Culture and Practice, 1700-1850* (Aldershot, 1999).

<sup>146</sup> See Sweet, *Antiquaries*, pp. 119-53.

As with *The Blacksmiths*, then, Penny's *Imogen Discovered in the Cave* has deep roots in the characteristic modes of imagery of the Society of Artists and in the work of Francis Hayman; but the numerous distinctive features of Penny's work suggest that his practice was now moving in a new direction. In fact – and this is where Penny's second Academy exhibit parts company from his first – the painting, pitching itself as a self-consciously elevated production, can be seen to have operated as an eloquent expression of, or manifesto for, the Academy's high-minded artistic ideals.

This is particularly evident in the gendering of Penny's image, which is very different to that of his first submission. Rather than focusing on a group of male protagonists, the artist's *Imogen Discovered in the Cave* centres upon a female subject. Imogen, as we have mentioned, qualified as an archetypal heroine in distress, having been falsely accused of adultery and forced to leave her home, though never losing, throughout her travails, her deep affection for her husband. As such, Penny's central character, cast as the leading protagonist in an archetypal Arcadian love story, stood as an overwhelmingly romantic figure, linking the artist's work to prevailing ideas about sensibility and sentimentality.<sup>147</sup> Significantly, these corresponding cultural values, popularized by such novels as Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* of 1748, pronounced the spontaneous expression of heightened, intense human emotion as the pinnacle of moral and aesthetic refinement.<sup>148</sup> Women in particular were posited as the primary agents of this supposedly unaffected and natural mode of feeling and, as we see, Imogen, appearing to be both highly sensitised and acutely responsive to the other characters' cautious advances, embodied this ideal perfectly.

Penny's eponymous heroine, however, was not the only female character to be portrayed in such a romantic and sentimental guise within an exhibition work. Six years before, Benjamin West had made his London debut with a pair of paintings, *Angelica and Medoro* and *Cymon and Iphigenia*, which portrayed comparable

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<sup>147</sup> On sensibility and the growth of sentimental culture in Georgian Britain, see John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1997), pp. 113-22; John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1988); and Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London, 1986).

<sup>148</sup> Brewer discusses the dynamics of sentimental literature in *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, pp. 114-20.

female subjects.<sup>149</sup> In fact, West can be seen to have made such works his personal speciality, producing, for the Society of Artists from the mid-1760s onwards, a whole raft of sentimental images – the overtly affecting *Venus and Cupid* and *Diana and Endymion* to name but two – that explored related themes of love and romance.<sup>150</sup> Continuing this strand of imagery within its own display, the Academy also included a considerable number of exhibits spotlighting a tender and romantic female heroine as an alternative to prevailing male heroic ideals. For instance, Nathaniel Dance-Holland's main submission for 1770 depicted the meeting of Helen and Paris, as related in Homer's *Iliad*, whilst Gavin Hamilton, dramatizing an equally affecting episode from ancient history, exhibited a piece portraying the famous Roman wife Agrippina weeping over the ashes of her dead husband, the great Roman general Germanicus.<sup>151</sup> By abandoning his group of 'low' working men for a desirable and virtuous female heroine, therefore, Penny was actively contributing to a mode of artistic practice that was now recognised as intrinsic to the Academy's distinguished identity.

Penny's depiction of an exemplary female heroine is complemented by a no less significant focus on a group of 'high' male subjects that together promote very different modes of masculinity to that advanced by the artist's *The Blacksmiths*. The male characters pictured in this second work may have stepped out of the woods after a day's hunting and foraging for food but they are, as already noted above, supremely refined figures. Not only are the two princes attired in elegant costumes that belie their simple, frugal existence, they also carry weapons that appear too sophisticated for the primitive tasks they apparently undertake. Whilst the prince at the far left is shown holding a sword (a weapon more suited to the battlefield heroics of a noble warrior than the rudimentary exploits of a crude cave-dweller), his brother is armed with a bow and quiver of arrows that appear too delicate for the practicalities of trapping and killing animals. In this sense, Penny's characters are

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<sup>149</sup> The idea that a 'softer', overtly romantic form of imagery was fast becoming central to London's exhibition culture thanks to the efforts of artists like West, is advanced in Solkin, *Painting for Money*, pp. 181-90.

<sup>150</sup> Both of these images, together with other such examples by West, are illustrated in Helmut von Erffa and Allen Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West* (New Haven and London, 1986), cat. nos. 112, 128, 137, 141, 188, 195, 196. For an engaging general discussion of West's works from the 1760s, see Ann Uhry Abrams, *The Valiant Hero: Benjamin West and Grand-Style History Painting* (Washington D.C., 1985)

<sup>151</sup> See item nos. 68 and 98 respectively in *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy, MDCCLXX: The Second* (London, 1770), pp. 8, 11.

more like genteel sportsmen who partake in the activity of hunting as a leisured, gentlemanly pastime. This point is further underscored by the central presence of the elegant hunting dog, which, rather appropriately for the kind of scene envisaged here, appears to derive (such a detail is absent from Shakespeare's text) from 'high' aristocratic portraiture. A useful comparison in this respect is provided by Pompeo Batoni's highly polished and flamboyant *Portrait of Charles Compton, Seventh Earl of Northampton* (fig. 38) from 1758, which pictures a similarly courtly gentleman with a loyal and graceful hunting dog at his side.

Penny, in his increasingly sophisticated treatment of these figures, clearly did not look to the vernacular and 'low' examples provided by the likes of Adriaen Brouwer and William Hogarth. Instead, his treatment has much closer affinities with the idealised figural model advanced by a very different artist, the classically-inspired and highly cosmopolitan Angelica Kauffman. Indeed, Kauffman's *Venus Showing Aeneas and Achates the Way to Carthage* (fig. 39), exhibited at the Academy's inaugural exhibition, offers an especially suggestive and immediate precedent for Penny's portrayal of the young princes.<sup>152</sup> Besides picturing a pair of elite male subjects set alongside a virtuous female heroine, what is immediately striking about Kauffman's image is the way its emphatically 'classical' division of space underscores the extremely cultivated air of the depicted protagonists. For instance, although Kauffman's trio of characters appear to form a privatised and intimate grouping, they are also portrayed as a series of self-possessed and self-contained individuals and so as the constituents of a balanced and orderly body. Even while Kauffman, in other words, pictured Venus inclining her head towards these figures as she engages with them, all three characters could be seen to retain an unmistakable uprightness or stateliness of demeanour. Closely echoing Kauffman's grid-like figural arrangement, Penny's two protagonists are strung out across the canvas in a linear and visually-harmonious manner that similarly underscores their collective poise and grace, further amplifying the contrast with the unregulated huddle of 'low' urban men portrayed in the artist's first submission. Significantly, both princes are also defined, in line with the hyper-civilised individuals contained

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<sup>152</sup> See item no. 63 in *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy, MDCCLXIX*, p. 8. For more on Kauffman's image, produced as one of a series of four paintings showcasing subjects from Homer's *Iliad*, see Wendy Wassyng Roworth, *Angelica Kauffman: A Continental Artist in Georgian England* (London, 1992), pp. 42-60.

within Kauffman's image, by their elegant and stately gestures. In particular, the pose of the prince nearest to the cave entrance closely echoes that of Kauffman's Venus. Like the ethereal classical goddess, Penny's character not only assumes a delicately-poised 'contrapposto' stance reminiscent of the beautified *Apollo Belvedere* but is also shown raising his left arm in a sweeping outward arc that systematically directs our gaze beyond the group in which he stands towards the more distant narrative detail of the cave and, within its shadowed confines, the disguised figure of Imogen.<sup>153</sup> It is almost as though Kauffman, by depicting Venus directing her two male companions out of the imagined space of the canvas in 1769, sowed the initial seed for this pictorial motif, which Penny then picked up and developed within his second exhibit one year later.

This strong visual link, more crucially, allows us to go one stage further in our reading of the image and say that, in contrast to his previous exhibit, Penny's second Academy piece promoted a form of masculinity that was increasingly 'softened' and thus more concerned to promote the highly polished feminine qualities associated with Kauffman's iconic female character than to assert a raw and uncouth manliness. We can further reinforce this idea by comparing Penny's work to a second painting by the female artist that was also exhibited at the Academy in 1770. Kauffman's *Vortigern Enamoured with Rowena, at the Banquet of Hengist, the Saxon General* (fig. 40), as its title suggests, referenced another major episode from ancient British history.<sup>154</sup> Drawing on Raphael Holinshed's celebrated *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* of 1577 (also, incidentally, the main source for Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*), Kauffman portrayed the fifth-century British king Vortigern, as a result of becoming infatuated with the beautiful maiden Rowena, trading away his land and possessions to her father, the Saxon general Hengist, and her uncle Horsa, shown seated to the far right of the table.<sup>155</sup> More than just dramatizing a comparable British subject, however, Kauffman's treatment of the male protagonists in this work is notable for its markedly 'softened' character. Presented as a trio of beautified, even androgynous figures, all three characters can be seen as male equivalents to

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<sup>153</sup> This famous antique sculpture is illustrated in Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny's seminal book on the history of taste, *Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture 1500-1900* (New Haven and London, 1981), fig. 77.

<sup>154</sup> See item no. 116 in *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy, MDCCLXX*, p. 12. On the use of Vortigern as a subject, see Juliet Feibel, 'Vortigern, Rowena and the Ancient Britons: Historical Art and the Anglicization of National Origin', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, vol. 24, no. 1 (winter 2000): 1-21.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*: 1.

Rowena, their collective physicality appearing to be tempered and transformed (particularly in the case of the otherwise rugged Vortigern) by their contact with and deep appreciation for the beautiful female heroine. Penny, we can likewise suggest, employed the same formula in his portrayal of the prince nearest the cave, casting this figure – in the manner of Kauffman’s devoted male subjects – as the male counterpart to Imogen. In this respect, Penny’s character, like Kauffman’s Vortigern, can also be seen to represent a male subject who becomes enamoured with a compelling female figure.<sup>156</sup> Echoing the love-struck British king, he faces Imogen directly, his extended left arm – almost appearing to be raised in a gesture of affectionate greeting – mirroring the heroine’s precisely. In fact, with his body half-swivelled towards us, making it clear that he also wears garments matching those worn by the disguised heroine, the prince stands as the literal double of the young princess. We should remember here that Shakespeare’s play, apart from hinging on the love story involving this heroine and her misguided husband, also incorporates the narrative (albeit unacknowledged until the end) of Imogen as a sister finding her two long-forgotten brothers Guiderius and Arviragus. In the playwright’s text, both princes develop a strong affection for the disguised heroine, but Arviragus in particular (not knowing her true identity) is spellbound by his disguised sister, stating that ‘I love this youth’.<sup>157</sup> It would therefore seem that Penny, in seeking to find an appropriate visual language with which to represent Arviragus’s feeling of affinity with Imogen, turned to Kauffman’s classicising imagery.

Penny, nevertheless, appears to have recognised the danger of following Kauffman too closely and of thereby allowing his work to lurch too far into the feminine. For, rather than using the same figural model for the character of Belarius, the artist drew on a very different set of masculine values, and positioned this other male character at the opposite pole of legitimate masculinity. In other words, if Penny’s figure of Arviragus can be seen to embody the ‘softened’ corporeal qualities of the young and ‘beautiful’ Apollo, then his representation of Belarius aligns itself more closely with that antique character’s bodily opposite, Hercules.<sup>158</sup> In his seminal *Antiquity*

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<sup>156</sup> Arviragus declares his brotherly love for Imogen in Act 4, Scene 2, shortly after he and his two companions have introduced themselves to the disguised heroine. See Nosworthy (ed.), *Cymbeline*, p. 124, line 21.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124, line 21.

<sup>158</sup> For a useful comparative illustration of this sculpture, see Haskell and Penny, *Taste and the Antique*, fig. 118.

*Explained* of 1721, Bernard de Montfaucon described this iconic classical figure as being of a ‘huge size’ and possessing an ‘incredible strength of body’.<sup>159</sup> According to Montfaucon, as a man ‘whom so many imminent dangers could never shake’, Hercules was typically depicted holding a club and a lion skin in one hand but was also distinguished, as a further mark of his virility, by ‘his short hair, his beard and his fierce air’.<sup>160</sup> Penny’s character, as we see from his own bearded face, his hugeness of scale and general solidity, coheres closely with this description. He may not be shown carrying a club and a fearlessly-won animal skin but, as his earthy clothes and heroic proportions testify, he exudes the manly vigour necessary to carry out Herculean feats. Guiderius is also markedly less effeminate than his brother, following a figural model that, stressing physicality and artistry, pitches him as a man of action and daring adventure. Pictured turning away from us, we are made to focus not on this character’s elegant and refined clothing (as we are with Arviragus) but on his well-muscled lower and upper body. Moreover, with his exaggeratedly long legs set decisively apart, making it appear that he has just run into the scene from the forest where he was hunting earlier, Penny’s prince almost doubles as one of the dynamic male figures in another composition that advanced an overtly ‘heroic’ form of masculinity within the Academy exhibition of 1770, Joshua Reynolds’s *Colonel Acland and Lord Sydney: The Archers* (fig. 41).<sup>161</sup> As its title indicates, Reynolds’s image portrayed two young aristocrats, Dudley Alexander Sydney Cosby, Lord Sydney and Colonel John Dyke Acland, striding through a thickly wooded glade and brandishing bows, as though taking part in a rural hunt. Reflecting – just as Penny’s character could be seen to do – ‘high’ academic notions of the magnificent male hero, both Sydney and Acland, appearing to fire their arrows in perfect unison and, in doing so, leaving a trail of dead deer and game in their wake, stood as the epitome of virile manliness. With its echoes of the heightened animation of Reynolds’s two subjects, Penny’s picture came to be tied to a further strand of imagery that lay at the centre of the Academy display.

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<sup>159</sup> Bernard de Montfaucon, *Antiquity Explained, and Represented in Sculptures* (trans. David Humphreys) (5 vols) (London, 1721), vol. 1, pt. 2, bk. 1, p. 124.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>161</sup> See item no. 145 (given as ‘The Portraits of Two Gentlemen’) in *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy, MDCCLXX*, p. 15. For further discussions of this work, see Martin Postle (ed.), *Joshua Reynolds: The Creation of Celebrity*, exh. cat. (London, Tate Gallery, 2005), cat. no. 61; David Mannings, *Sir Joshua Reynolds: A Complete Catalogue of his Paintings* (2 vols) (New Haven and London, 2000), vol. 1, p. 58; and Nicholas Penny (ed.), *Reynolds*, exh. cat. (London, Royal Academy of Arts, 1986), p. 242.

But the division of male and female roles is further complicated by the remaining figure in Penny's composition. As the artist's portrayal of Imogen also makes clear, we are not dealing with a straightforward female heroine but one who appears in the guise of a man. Aside from being cast as the female object of devotion, Imogen also stands as a much-admired 'male' companion—hence Arviragus's use of the generic term 'youth' when referring to the princess. She too, we can say, becomes a 'middling', androgynous figure, who is both a female heroine – like Kauffman's Rowena – and a male paragon akin to the beautified Hengist and Horsa. It is almost as though Penny, in choosing to depict this particular scene, sought to have the best of both Academy worlds, uniting a combination of well-recognised themes that allowed him to bridge the two strands of practice – that of Kauffman's 'soft' feminine and Reynolds's valiant masculine imagery – most central to the institution's display in 1770.

In fact, we can think of the artist's figural grouping as not only bringing these two forms of 'high' visual imagery together but as actually dramatizing the complex pictorial fusion produced by this union. With the overtly heroic figure of Guiderius positioned to the far left of the canvas and Imogen, as the 'sensible' counterpoint to this prince, positioned to the far right, Arviragus – in the manner of Wolfe and Granby – stands as the narrative link between the differing figural worlds that his companions represent. As such, we can also see Penny's painting as a meditation on the different aspects of the prince's identity, standing as he does on the cusp of the spaces occupied by Imogen and Belarius. The prince, we can say, is caught between, and as such connects, the realm of primitive virtue into which he has been introduced by Belarius, and the realm of public duty to which he is destined by his true identity as a prince of royal blood. Yet, even whilst Penny can be seen to have reused Shaftesbury's well-tried narrative formula as a means of balancing out and adding clarity to what was a highly ambitious and difficult artistic manoeuvre, it is apparent that the artist failed to achieve absolute harmony within his image. In the very act of centralising the 'softened' figure of Arviragus and taking the male trio away from the world of the hunt to pay court to Imogen, Penny only really succeeded in pulling his work further to the side of the romantic—and therefore to what was ultimately the ultra-feminised and over-refined.

### III

Reading these two important works in tandem not only adds greater weight to our view of Penny as an ambitious, adaptable practitioner but also begins to bring into focus our understanding of his attempts to work out an alternative mode of Academic imagery that, while conforming to the lofty goals of the new institution, retained its distinctive ‘Britishness’ and popular appeal. In his exhibits for the Academy’s opening shows of 1769 and 1770, Penny explored two very different – indeed one might almost say opposed – solutions to this problem that played to very different aesthetic concerns. Although incorporating a distinctly ‘conformist’ political message and drawing upon a prestigious Old Master exemplar, *The Blacksmiths* was clearly meant to provide a vivid and engaging picture of the humbler reaches of contemporary life, a modern equivalent to ‘low’ Dutch genre painting. When set against this work, Penny’s next submission, *Imogen Discovered in the Cave*, appears to signal a bold change of direction. Seeking to follow his more cosmopolitan colleagues, Penny pulled far closer than ever before towards traditional history painting and the ‘high’ academic ideal. The artist, after exhibiting an unabashedly ‘low’ image that received a somewhat mixed reception, presumably felt the need with his *Imogen Discovered in the Cave* to produce a picture that conformed to the Academy’s elevated artistic standards and so legitimised his position as Professor of Painting. In spite of their differences, however, both works operated to assert their emphatically ‘British’ identity. By drawing on Shakespearean sources and making reference in their narrative and pictorial treatment to distinctively ‘national’ concerns, whether in contemporary politics or in antiquarian culture, these works made it clear that Penny aspired to a mode of practice that could stand up against the most sophisticated productions of his peers without forsaking his identity as a quintessentially ‘British’ painter.

That a painter at the apex of the Academy’s hierarchy should have pursued such an emphatically vernacular form of artistic practice calls into question the received opinion of the institution’s identity. On one level, therefore, we can take Penny’s contrasting pair of submissions to indicate that the Academy did not exclusively align itself with classicising and Italianate pictorial modes. For further confirmation

of this, we need only turn to Johann Zoffany's well-known portrait of *The Academicians of the Royal Academy* (fig. 42) from 1772.<sup>162</sup> Zoffany's image, showing the thirty-six founding members of the Academy gathered in the principle rooms at Old Somerset House, essentially depicts the consolidation of London's artistic community, the moment when the notion of a national school of art can be said to have become truly pertinent. What is especially striking about this is that even as Zoffany's painting promotes a view of the Academy as a privileged – and predominantly male – space governed by an advanced form of connoisseurial observation and learned discussion, the artist's piece portrays a grouping of artists that explicitly mixes proponents of Continental-style 'grand manner' art with practitioners known for their characteristically localised and naturalistic portrayals. Thus Penny and Hayman, as the leading representatives of a familiar, self-consciously 'British' pictorial tradition, are shown alongside Reynolds and West, the foremost promoters of a more rarefied, classicising mode of Academic practice. It even appears, upon close inspection of the picture, that these differing artistic sympathies are reflected in the varying attitudes in which the individual artists are portrayed. Reynolds, elegantly posed in a black velvet suit, is shown in the midst of polite conversation with the Academy's secretary, Francis Milner Newton. Hayman, by contrast, is shown seated, legs apart, in the foreground, unaffectedly surveying the scene before him as the model is being set in his pose. Penny, meanwhile, can be seen standing with his head in profile, towards the rear of the image, a figure whose work provided an alternative to the dominant aesthetic in the Academy but who has nevertheless been given a magisterial pose wholeheartedly fitted to his professorial position. In presenting such an inclusive grouping, Zoffany's image, in other words, shows the Academy to have been a more tolerant and informal body than has generally been supposed, an institution that was not just about West's grandiose historical paintings or Reynolds's *Discourses*. Like Penny's highly significant exhibition submissions, Zoffany's portrait confirms the status of the new institution as a capacious, not exclusionary, artistic enterprise.

Nevertheless, Penny himself appears to have felt dissatisfied with the way both his earliest Academy performances attempted to resolve the exhibition problem. If *The*

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<sup>162</sup> A complete key to this painting is to be found in Jane Roberts (ed.), *George III and Queen Charlotte: Patronage, Collecting and Court Taste* (London, 2004), p. 185.

*Blacksmiths* seems to have been too 'low' for the new institution's increasingly dignified exhibition space, *Imogen Discovered in the Cave* was almost too 'high' to fit comfortably with the artist's established exhibition persona. Certainly, when we think of the portraits of *Wolfe* and *Granby*, it is clear that these works were not about promoting an ostentatious refinement and elegance but about celebrating a straightforward masculine virtue and restraint. It is therefore highly significant that, in succeeding years, the artist looked back to those images from the mid-1760s for which he was best known as he sought to find a form of art that could transcend the extreme poles of the 'high' and the 'low'. It is to Penny's attempt to recreate these earlier submissions in a form worthy of the new Academy that we will now turn.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE LUTE AND THE CANNON

Penny's exhibition output in the three years which followed 1770 formed a distinctive pattern. Not only does he appear to have continued submitting limited numbers of pieces to the Academy's burgeoning displays but, redeploying his strategy of the previous decade, to have alternated between small bodies of portraits and equally small bodies of subject paintings. Indeed, rather than exploiting his privileges as a principal Academician and filling the Pall Mall exhibition space with scores of self-consciously showy paintings, Penny exhibited nothing more than a single portrait in 1771, a pair of historical pictures in 1772, and then no works at all in 1773.<sup>163</sup>

This highly selective approach to exhibiting, although difficult to fully account for, does seem to offer valuable insights into the artist's working methods as well as his Academy persona. It is clear, for instance, that, in choosing to exhibit these particular works, Penny was seeking to demonstrate his developing capabilities as both a portraitist and a subject painter and, in doing so, to promote the versatility and capaciousness of his evolving practice. At the same time, the sparing number of Academy submissions in this period also points to the idea that the artist was adopting an increasingly considered and labour-intensive approach, devoting large amounts of time to planning and executing one-off, flagship pieces. In this sense, Penny's solitary portrait of 1771 can also be understood as having represented a kind of 'interlude' or break in his exhibition activity.<sup>164</sup> Producing likenesses, however important the sitter, was a relatively routine and risk-free business compared with that of producing subject paintings. Through exhibiting a standard portrait, the artist was effectively providing himself with a stop-gap to perfect the two narrative scenes that he subsequently sent to the Academy in 1772. These pictures, then, were almost

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<sup>163</sup> See item no. 152 in *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy, MDCCLXXI: The Third* (London, 1771), p. 16; items nos. 191 and 192 in *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy, MDCCLXXII: The Fourth* (London, 1772), p. 18; and *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy, MDCCLXXIII: The Fifth* (London, 1773), where Penny's name is conspicuously absent from the alphabetical listing of exhibitors.

<sup>164</sup> That Penny's portrait was consciously pitched as a more minor work in comparison to his subject paintings of the following year is suggested by the fact that his piece was exhibited under the unabashedly prosaic title 'A Portrait'.

certainly the main focus of Penny's work in the years leading up to their formal submission and, as such, this chapter will make them its central concern.

That Penny's two major subject works from this period were exhibited together, moreover, sheds even greater light on his changing priorities as an artist and Academy exhibitor. In choosing to display both pieces alongside each other, Penny was not merely making a statement about his wide-ranging artistic ambitions; he was, even more suggestively, drawing attention to the particular combination that his 'twinned' exhibits offered. More than just producing two individual works which showed off his practice to the best advantage, in other words, I would suggest that the artist was returning to and developing the strategy he had deployed at the Society of Artists of exhibiting two paintings as a carefully considered, complementary unit. As with his 1764 and 1765 exhibits, his latest images, showing *Rosamond and Queen Eleanor* and *Lord Clive Explaining to the Nabob the Situation of the Invalids in India*, combined a scene of contemporary military benevolence with a second, more intimately scaled work, this time depicting a celebrated episode from British history. Again, the pictures functioned as clear opposites, combining a highly elevated depiction of exemplary virtue with a highly engaging work on a popular theme; but the two works now also had discernible common features that reflected the demands of Penny's Academy position. Thus, even whilst these emphatically patriotic pictures reused the template utilised by the artist's earlier exhibits, they also took his practice in new and complex directions.

## I

In the absence of Penny's original and, as yet, untraced representation of *Rosamond and Queen Eleanor*, we must look to John Raphael Smith's 1774 mezzotint after the painting to gain some sense of its composition and handling (fig. 43). Smith's engraving can be confidently presumed to provide a faithful reproduction of the image and shows that the artist's work featured two female subjects, the celebrated medieval beauty Rosamond Clifford and the famously formidable wife of Henry II, Eleanor of Aquitaine. Rather than constituting a straightforward historical portrait,

however, it is clear that Penny's image was tied to a very particular historical narrative, the story of 'Fair Rosamond'.<sup>165</sup> This legendary tale centred on Rosamond's ill-fated romance with King Henry. According to the legend, Rosamond, having become Henry's mistress in the 1170s, had been placed in a secluded bower in Woodstock to protect her from Queen Eleanor's intense jealousy. Nevertheless, gaining entry to the bower and confronting Rosamond, Eleanor compelled her rival to choose between a dagger and a bowl of poison in expiation of her sin. Rosamond, we are told, chose to drink the poison and her body was later interred in Godstow Priory. As the dagger and goblet in Eleanor's hands indicate, Penny's exhibit captured the climactic moment in the story, when Eleanor avenged herself on Rosamond: the enraged Queen, the instruments of vengeance in her hands, stands before the kneeling and suppliant figure of the young noblewoman. Like his earlier *The Blacksmiths* and *Imogen Discovered in the Cave*, then, the artist's newest production portrayed a subject that was both rooted in English history and tied to a well-recognised narrative. This time, however, Penny's image, departing from such specifically Shakespearian themes, drew upon a variety of dramatic, textual and visual precedents.

The most immediate source for Penny's painting was almost certainly Joseph Addison's *Rosamond – An Opera*.<sup>166</sup> Addison's work, as its title implies, took the form of an opera 'after the Italian manner'.<sup>167</sup> Thus, rather than simply recounting Rosamond's story or drawing out the narrative's romantic associations, the author's production essentially focused upon dramatizing the legend's tragic plotline—a feature which we see closely mirrored in Penny's image. Comparing his *Rosamond and Queen Eleanor* with the relevant lines in Addison's text, it becomes clear that the artist sought to evoke the equivalent scene from the earlier author's production. Indeed, Penny's strikingly fearsome portrait of Eleanor gains in potency when we view it alongside the lines spoken by Addison's corresponding character:

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<sup>165</sup> For more on the genesis and historical development of the story, see Virgil B. Heltzel, *Fair Rosamond: A Study of the Development of a Literary Theme* (Northwestern University Studies in the Humanities, no. 16) (Evanston, 1947), pp. 1-14.

<sup>166</sup> Addison's adaptation of the story, which debuted at the Drury Lane Theatre on 4 March 1707, was immediately printed as Joseph Addison, *Rosamond: An Opera* (London, 1707), before being reprinted in that same year and again in 1713.

<sup>167</sup> This phrase was used in the newspaper advertisements for the updated staging of the opera at Lincoln's-Inn Fields in spring 1733. See *The Daily Journal*, 1 March-30 April 1733.

Thus arm'd with double Death I come:  
 Behold, vain Wretch, behold thy Doom!  
 Thy Crimes to their full Period tend,  
 And soon by This or This shall end...  
 'Tis Guilt that does thy Tongue controul  
 Or quickly drain the fatal Bowl,  
 Or this right Hand performs its part,  
 And plants a Dagger in thy heart.<sup>168</sup>

In the same way, the artist's affectingly pathetic likeness of Rosamond becomes the visual analogue of this character's spoken response:

Think on the Soft, the tender Fires,  
 Melting Thoughts and gay Desires,  
 That in your own Bosom rise,  
 When languishing with Love-sick Eyes  
 That great, that charming Man you see:  
 Think on your Self, and pity me!<sup>169</sup>

As these correspondences make clear, Penny's work formed a visual equivalent to Addison's opera. As such, it is likely that the artist was seeking – as in his earlier Shakespearean works – to associate his works with a highly prestigious literary source.

Indeed, Addison enjoyed an unquestioned status at this time as one of the greatest English writers. Like Shakespeare, he occupied a central place in Britain's literary canon, not only being celebrated as a modern author whose works already constituted true 'classics' but as one whose career embodied a national tradition. Indeed, we need only look to the broad array of texts that were published on Addison from the time of his death in 1719 – works such as those by Allan Ramsay and Edward Young – to see how far the author had come to be treated as a modern literary hero.<sup>170</sup> This view, moreover, appears to have prevailed with increasing

<sup>168</sup> Addison, *Rosamond*, pp. 21-22, lines 175-78, 181-84.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22, lines 200-205.

<sup>170</sup> Allan Ramsay, *Richy and Sandy; A Pastoral on the Death of Mr Joseph Addison* (Edinburgh[?], 1719[?]); Edward Young, *Letter to Mr Tickell. Occasioned by the Death of the Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq* (London, 1719).

intensity in the years leading up to the production of Penny's picture, as is evident from the numerous collected editions of Addison's works that were published in this period. These not only included all of the author's major writings but also detailed biographical notes on his life.<sup>171</sup> It is also highly significant that Addison's prose, as Samuel Johnson made clear in his account of the author in his *Prefaces, Biographical and Critical, to the Work of the English Poets* from 1779, was celebrated as promoting a uniquely English style of writing, the 'genuine Anglicism' that Johnson described as 'familiar but not coarse, elegant but not ostentatious'.<sup>172</sup> By continuing to gain in popularity and nationalistic appeal throughout this period, then, the author provided Penny with the perfect model to look to, lending his work greater credibility as an ambitious and dignified exhibition piece.

The theme of *Rosamond and Queen Eleanor* was also particularly timely. Consideration of the performance history of Addison's *Rosamond* shows that it enjoyed renewed success and popularity in the years leading up to 1770. Although poorly received when first performed in 1709 with a score by Thomas Clayton (a contemporary critic dismissed it as 'no better than a confused chaos of Musick'), the text was taken up by Thomas Arne in the early 1730s with more satisfactory results.<sup>173</sup> The opera was then performed twice at Drury Lane during the 1760s, first in April 1765 and again in April 1767. In addition, whilst the first staging appears to have followed the format established by Arne, the second was altered in two important ways. Firstly, it was given a new musical score by the highly popular composer Samuel Arnold.<sup>174</sup> Arnold, significantly, had not only built his career compiling music for a host of theatrical productions but also for a variety of London venues, including Vauxhall Gardens, for which he produced three separate

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<sup>171</sup> Key examples include Jacob Tonson's four-volume editions of Addison, entitled *Works of the Late Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq* (to be examined at greater length in a later part of the section) and *Miscellaneous Works in Verse and Prose, of the Right Honourable Joseph Addison* and published in 1761 and 1765 respectively.

<sup>172</sup> Samuel Johnson, *Prefaces, Biographical and Critical, to the Works of the English Poets* (10 vols) (London, 1779), vol. 5, p. 158.

<sup>173</sup> The same critic tells us that 'after the third Night it expired, and tis generally thought it wou'd not have liv'd so long had not the good natur'd Physicians supported its Spirits with a little *Aurum Potabile*'. See François Ragueneau, *A Comparison Between the French and Italian Musick and Opera's* (London, 1709), pp. 68-69.

<sup>174</sup> For Arnold's revised version of Addison's opera, see Joseph Addison, *Rosamond: An Opera (Altered from Mr Addison); The Music Entirely New Set by Mr Arnold* (London, 1767).

collections of songs.<sup>175</sup> In addition, Addison's opera was also shortened and condensed to give a greater focus on the dramatic confrontation between Rosamond and Queen Eleanor. Whereas this episode had only formed a relatively small part of Addison's original production, it was now central to the action, taking up most of the opera's second act.

Just how vital an ingredient this scene seems to have become, is indicated by Ashley Cowper's Prologue, also written in 1767, to a private performance of Addison's *Rosamond*. Here, Cowper outlines for his audience the merits of the earlier author's opera, declaring that its singular appeal lies in the encounter between Rosamond and Eleanor. As Cowper states,

No scene to-night your fix'd Attention draws,  
 Old Cato bleeding in his country's cause;  
 No shackled Bajazet, with impious rage,  
 Mouths at his fate, and shakes our humble stage—  
 No suff'ring Innocence bids Virtue weep,  
 Nor whining Heroes lull you fast asleep—  
 And yet so moving is our well-wrought ditty,  
 Your Terror 'twill excite, as well as Pity:  
 No feign'd Catastrophe, but real woe,  
 Such as drew tears—five hundred years ago.  
 Relentless, fierce, an Eleanor appears,  
 While Rosamond, with eyes brim-full of tears,  
 Her unavailing hands for mercy rears—  
 In Youth and Beauty's prime condemn'd to prove  
 The sharpest stings of lawless, guilty love.  
 Such is the treat to which you're all invited...<sup>176</sup>

It is the highly affecting – rather than heroic – nature of this historic scene that, for Cowper, constitutes 'the treat' to which every viewer is made witness. Through

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<sup>175</sup> See Philip H. Highfill, Kalman A. Burnim and Edward A. Langhans, *A Biographical Dictionary of Artists, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660-1800* (12 vols) (Carbondale, 1973-93), vol. 1, p. 126.

<sup>176</sup> Ashley Cowper, 'A Prologue; To the Opera of Rosamond, as it was performed in a Private Family', in his *Poems and Translations: By the Author of the Progress of Physic* (London, 1767), p. 173.

presenting the privatised actions of these two female characters, and thereby resisting the temptation to dramatize the grand public exploits of such archetypal male protagonists as Cato and Bajazet, Addison's opera, we are told, achieves far greater poignancy. What sets the author's production apart, in other words, is its ability to move the emotions of its audience on an everyday, human level. Cowper's lines, in this respect, strongly reaffirm why this subject proved to be such an attractive choice for Penny. In choosing *Rosamond and Queen Eleanor*, the artist was not only alluding to Addison's opera and evoking a stage production that was still vivid and fresh in the minds of his viewers; he was also choosing a scene that, as Cowper's piece makes strikingly clear, operated within his familiar, anti-heroic and non-exclusive, vein without forsaking the respectability of his exhibit.

No less significantly, Penny's representation of this scene continued his close association with the work of Francis Hayman. Aside from appearing in a range of single and collected volumes throughout the century, Addison's *Rosamond* was also issued as part of a deluxe edition of the author's works. This publication, entitled *The Works of the Late Right Honourable Joseph Addison*, was released as a four-volume set in 1761 and incorporates a series of illustrations by Hayman (fig. 44). For his representation of Rosamond, Hayman chose the same scene; and the close resemblance between the two artists' images is striking, suggesting that, once again, Penny was seeking to adopt the practice of his predecessor. As we see, Hayman's illustration not only foreshadowed Penny's work in its employment of a near-identical compositional arrangement, it also appears to have contained a number of additional elements which Penny's later portrayal reused. For instance, we find that Hayman, in accordance with his reputation as a skilled portraitist, used his characters' differing facial expressions as a vehicle for conveying the high emotion of the episode. Whilst Rosamond is pictured gazing imploringly upwards, Eleanor, befitting her status as the impassioned female avenger, is likewise depicted glaring with malicious intent at the heroine, her brow deeply furrowed with suggested fury and hatred. Fascinatingly, Hayman can also be seen to have made full use of the legendary landscape in which the scene is supposed to have taken place. The artist sets his figures against a densely wooded backdrop, including, as Penny can be seen to have done in his work, very few additional background features to break the impenetrable mass of foliage. Hayman's illustration, therefore, offered a framework

for portraying the scene which Penny adapted and developed in a remarkably literal manner.

Examining Penny's *Rosamond and Queen Eleanor* again, however, we find numerous features which not only distinguish the artist's work from that of his predecessor but which also display certain unifying characteristics. Most obviously, Penny's image reworks the composition in a way that greatly enhances its capacity to engage its audience. Framing the scene by expanding Hayman's wooded backdrop, Penny creates a quite different form of encounter between the viewer and the depicted confrontation. Thus, obscuring part of Eleanor's lower body, the network of branches and leaves extends from the top to the bottom left-hand corner of the image, casting a long shadow across the picture's foreground. As well as setting up a bold visual contrast with the tall architectural structure to the right, the clearing's thick border of vegetation systematically channels our gaze towards the encounter taking place in the middle zone of the image. It is almost as though, having just stumbled across the bower, we are glimpsing the action in person. In the manner described by Cowper, Rosamond's plight and her tragic outpouring of emotion become our own thrilling discovery—a small-scale but nevertheless spectacular event that only we are witness to.

The emotional impact of the scene is further enhanced by the treatment of the protagonists. In contrast to the delicate and graceful proportions of Hayman's equivalent figures, Penny's characters are both amplified in scale and simplified in form. Eleanor, in particular, is made conspicuously larger and more forbidding in Penny's work. Not only is her costume rendered in what appear to be predominantly dark hues but, being over double the size of Hayman's corresponding character, the Queen fills almost the entire left side of the artist's picture. Even taking into account the possible distortion that comes from viewing Penny's work as a graphic reproduction, the figure of Eleanor displays a solidity and boldness of outline which make her far more substantial and 'real' than her earlier counterpart. Indeed, the artist's self-consciously plain and straightforward treatment of this character makes her and the action she performs seem strikingly immediate.

No less conspicuously, Penny treated his representation of the bower in a distinctly 'Gothic' manner. With its pointed archway and series of narrow leaded windows,

this feature of the artist's image calls to mind the characteristically attenuated forms of medieval architecture. Not only does this add to the historical authenticity, and thus antiquarian appeal, of his scene but, contrasting sharply with Hayman's French-inspired, emphatically rococo-style setting, it also acts as a powerful symbol of Britain's ancient past. Again, this suggests that Penny, by including such culturally resonant details within his picture, was seeking to open up his exhibit to an increasingly broad audience.

This can be confirmed by considering the literary antecedents of Addison's production. The story of Rosamond and Eleanor was not simply an elite literary production, but had a long history within the format of the ballad and of the ballad woodcut. Unlike most other contemporary literary and graphic products, ballads were specifically designed to appeal to the broadest possible readership.<sup>177</sup> Not only did these wares retell the songs and stories which, having been passed from generation to generation, had come to define mainstream culture, but they constituted the cheapest and most widely available form of printed literature. Reproduced on single folio sheets, ballads were characterised by plainness and simplicity of design. Indeed, even where they were enlivened by related woodcuts, these tended to be overwhelmingly crude productions. With this in mind, it is easy to imagine how pervasive such an economical and accessible art form must have been in contemporary culture, being encountered both through the songs that were sung on the streets and in the ever growing numbers of eye-catching prints that were to be found pasted to the walls of taverns and coffee-houses and all manner of other public spaces. The ballad, in other words, inhabited what Tessa Watt terms a 'shared culture' of cheap print.<sup>178</sup>

These characteristics are clearly evident in the wares of the leading ballad-seller of the day, William Dicey. Dicey, who had begun printing broadsides and chapbooks in the 1720s, established a veritable ballad empire at his Bow Church Yard warehouse, retailing his products at less than a penny to enhance saleability.<sup>179</sup> As the intensely-

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<sup>177</sup> A useful discussion of the form and character of early broadside ballads can be found in Alexandra Franklin, 'The Art of Illustration in Bodleian Broadside Ballads before 1820', *Bodleian Library Review*, vol. 17, no. 5 (April 2002): 327-52. See also Sheila O'Connell, *The Popular Print in England, 1550-1850* (London, 1999), esp. pp. 16-21.

<sup>178</sup> Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550-1640* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 5.

<sup>179</sup> Dicey's burgeoning print business is discussed at length in Victor E. Neuburg, 'The Dicey's and the Chapbook Trade', *The Library*, 5<sup>th</sup> series, vol. 24, no. 3 (1969): 219-31.

commercial ‘pile it high, sell it cheap’ attitude adopted by Dicey clearly implies, he predominantly sold ballads which featured the most recognisable vernacular subjects. Indeed, Dicey’s catalogue for 1754 is filled with items displaying such unabashedly populist titles as the *Blink-ey’d Cobler*, the *Bonny Milk-Maid* and the *Drunkard’s Last Legacy*.<sup>180</sup> Strikingly, the Rosamond story also comprised one of the principal products being advertised here, appearing as two different broadsides, entitled *Fair Rosamond’s Overthrow* and *Fair Rosamond and King Henry II*.<sup>181</sup>

Despite the apparent variety of Dicey’s two publications, the array of contemporary ballads which employed Rosamond as their heroine all ultimately derived from the same textual source, Thomas Deloney’s *A Mournfull Dittie, on the Death of Rosamond* from 1593.<sup>182</sup> Also taking the form of a ballad, Deloney’s work was itself written to be sung and enjoyed in the street. Looking at Deloney’s text in greater detail, we find in it the ultimate source both of the pivotal scene in Addison’s opera and also Penny’s image. Not only is the confrontation between Eleanor and Rosamond given special emphasis in Deloney’s work, but Penny’s image stands as the visual equivalent to the author’s narrative of the episode. Just as Eleanor is described ‘with stedfast Eye ... [commanding Rosamond to] drink thou up this deadly Draught’, Penny depicts the Queen gazing fixedly at the younger noblewoman whilst forcefully thrusting the cup of poison to her lips.<sup>183</sup> Moreover, Deloney’s account of Rosamond’s response, incorporating the evocative lines ‘...presently upon her knee, sweet Rosamond did fall/...her lilly Hands, she rung full often there/And down along her comely face, proceeded many a Tear’, corresponds almost exactly with the artist’s view of the heroine kneeling before the furious Queen.<sup>184</sup> In line with the ballad’s author, Penny also shows Rosamond with her hands clasped tightly in front of her, as though pleading with the merciless older female to spare her life. Thus, although Hayman’s corresponding illustration was

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<sup>180</sup> See William and Cluer Dicey, *A Catalogue of Maps, Prints, Copy-books, Drawing-books Etc., Histories, Old Ballads, Broad-sheet and other Patters, Garlands, Etc., Printed and Sold by William and Cluer Dicey at their Warehouse, Opposite the South Door of Bow-Church in Bow-Church-Yard, London* (London, 1754), pp. 45, 46, 48.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>182</sup> The centrality of Deloney’s composition and its widespread influence in ballad tradition is discussed in Heltzel, *Fair Rosamond*, p. 22. For the full text of the ballad, see the reprint under the title ‘The Death of Fair Rosamond’, in Thomas Deloney, *The Garland of Good-Will...Containing Many Pleasant Songs and Poems* (1631; London, 1710), not paginated.

<sup>183</sup> Deloney, ‘The Death of Fair Rosamond’, in *ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*

clearly Penny's immediate model, his image would also have readily recalled the widely-known verses of the original ballad to contemporary viewers. Indeed, Penny seems to have derived certain details of his representation directly from the original ballad text rather than through the intermediaries offered by Addison and Hayman. Penny's inclusion of a discarded lute within the scene has no precedent in Hayman's illustration but does have a direct parallel in Deloney's description of Rosamond as residing in Woodstock 'with Musickes sweet delight'. Aside from providing yet another potent reminder of the heroine's fragility – music was frequently used as a symbol of transience in early modern visual culture – this important narrative detail reinforces the idea that Penny's work was designed to provide a viewing experience that was self-consciously wide-ranging in scope.

Even more suggestively, the ballads which recounted Rosamond's story also feature woodcuts which portrayed the same scene and which display striking parallels with Penny's image. For instance, if we consider the woodcuts which illustrate such ballads as *A Lamentable Ballad of Fair Rosamond* (fig. 45) from 1659 and *The Life and Death of Fair Rosamond* (fig. 46) from 1750, we find many formal and stylistic correspondences with Penny's work. Even though Rosamond and Eleanor's encounter is conflated with a view of Henry and his attendant bidding the heroine farewell, these two woodcuts handle the iconic confrontation in a remarkably similar way to the artist's picture. Presenting Eleanor in an appropriately vengeful guise, both show the Queen standing before the kneeling and remorseful figure of Rosamond. Although it is the younger heroine who is depicted holding the cup of poison in these images, it is Eleanor who, in line with Penny's portrayal, is shown brandishing the dagger in her right hand. Significantly, this compositional arrangement is also repeated by the woodcuts which illustrate the chapbook versions of the story. For example, the imagery of *A Lamentable Ballad of Fair Rosamond* is repeated almost exactly on the title page of the chapbook edition of *The Life and Death of Fair Rosamond* (fig. 47), demonstrating the wide dissemination of potential models for Penny's corresponding figures.<sup>185</sup> In fact, focusing solely on the two female characters and featuring part of the bower where the episode is supposed to have taken place, this image provides a remarkably precise precedent for the artist's

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<sup>185</sup> The woodcut accompanying this publication is also reproduced in John Ashton, *Chap-Books of the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1882), p. 387.

work. We even find that the general plainness and straightforwardness of this illustration – and indeed the other woodcuts – strongly prefigures Penny’s lucid treatment of the scene. Characterised by the same boldness and simplicity, the artist’s figures find a close precedent in these palpably cruder, mass-produced images. These clear visual parallels with the ballad woodcuts along with the evidence of Deloney’s text strongly suggest that Penny’s *Rosamond and Queen Eleanor* was framed as a self-conscious reworking of the same story in ballad tradition. Penny, in other words, was reusing a graphic formula that stood as the polar opposite of elite Academic artistic practice. The key question, therefore, is to understand why Penny was so carefully drawing upon the original ballad sources as well as their more refined and dignified derivatives.

Crucially, the ballad as an art form not only ranked as a predominantly ‘low’ entertainment but was also recognised as catering to more learned tastes. Indeed, it was Addison himself who had wholeheartedly promoted the particular potency of the ballad as a literary form. Writing in *The Spectator* for May 1711, Addison not only declared his open enthusiasm for the ballad but suggested that such ‘songs and fables’ rivalled the works of ‘the greatest of the ancient poets’.<sup>186</sup> The ballad, he went on to note, was a form of literature that ‘pleases all kinds of palates’, before providing examples of some of the eminent figures who actively collected these productions:

I have heard that the late Lord Dorset, who had the greatest Wit tempered with the greatest Candour, and was one of the finest Criticks as well as the best Poets of his Age, had a numerous collection of old English Ballads, and took a particular Pleasure in the Reading of them. I can affirm the same of Mr Dryden, and know several of the most refined Writers of our present Age who are of the same Humour.<sup>187</sup>

Addison, in describing the merits of the famous ballad *The Children in the Wood*, also accounted for the genre’s attraction by stating that, despite ‘a despicable Simplicity in the Verse...the Sentiments appear genuine and unaffected [and so] move the Mind of the most polite Reader with inward Meltings of Humanity and

<sup>186</sup> Donald Bond (ed.), *The Spectator* (5 vols) (Oxford, 1965), no. 74 (25 May 1711), vol. 1, pp. 315-22.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 70 (21 May 1711), vol. 1, pp. 297-303; no. 85 (7 June 1711), vol. 1, pp. 360-64.

Compassion'.<sup>188</sup> For Addison, then, the unifying appeal of the popular ballad lay in its straightforwardness and lack of pretension. These qualities, as the author asserts, lent the ballad an artless naturalness and authenticity which placed it amongst the most affecting of literary forms.

With the help of supporters like Addison, the Ballad gained increasing purchase in more dignified forms of prose and illustration. If we turn to the fourth volume of Samuel Croxall's *A Select Collection of Novels and Histories*, published in 1729, we find that the Rosamond story was both retold as an evocative historical romance and illustrated as a finely engraved plate. Taking Croxall's text first, it is clear that this author's narrative was designed to excite the sympathies and emotions of its readers in a more self-consciously affecting and therefore increasingly sophisticated way than Deloney's ballad. Indeed, as its title, 'The Loves of Henry II and Fair Rosamond', suggests, the author's narrative is packed with passages which highlight the amorous and sentimental aspects of the story. In his description of Henry's departure for France, for instance, Croxall writes that '[Rosamond] show'd no Emotions but those of a disconsolate Mourner, and answer'd the king only with down-cast Eyes, and a Gush of Tears'.<sup>189</sup> Moreover, when recounting the heroine's response to Eleanor's final abuses, the author states that 'the poor trembling victim, almost dead with her fears, threw herself on her knees, and with Hands wrung with Agony, and Streaming Eyes, implored the Queen's mercy and pardon for her offences'.<sup>190</sup> Stressing, at every moment, Rosamond's heightened sensitivity and her heart-felt, inner anxiety, Croxall's text presents the young noblewoman as the archetypal vulnerable and suffering heroine. In this sense, we can say that Penny's choice of subject offered him the opportunity to revisit the sentimental theme of feminine distress. As we have seen, this motif, constituting a central trope of contemporary sentimental literature, was already one that Penny had employed to great effect in his *A Scene from 'Jane Shore'* of 1762.

It is also worth noting that when Croxall's narrative was republished in 1766, it was as part of an updated edition of the author's works which, entitled *The Novelist; or,*

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<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 85 (7 June 1711), vol. 1, pp. 360-64.

<sup>189</sup> Samuel Croxall, *A Select Collection of Novels and Histories... Written by the Most Celebrated Authors in Several Languages* (6 vols) (London, 1729), vol. 4, p. 225.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 231-32.

*Tea-Table Miscellany*, was expressly aimed at the ‘polite’, genteel reader.<sup>191</sup> This is further underlined when we consider the illustration which accompanied Croxall’s version of the Rosamond story (fig. 48). Produced by the London draughtsman Gerard van der Gucht and reproduced in both editions of Croxall’s works, the image, also portraying the confrontation between Rosamond and Eleanor, stood out as presenting an increasingly refined view of the scene. Firstly, in sharp contrast to the crude, mass-produced woodcuts which had accompanied the earlier ballads, van der Gucht’s illustration was conceived as a finely executed line engraving. The engraver’s image combined a deft lightness of touch with great elegance of line—qualities which were conspicuously lacking from the lower graphic product. In addition, despite following the woodcuts’ iconic arrangement of the two female figures, van der Gucht’s illustration was given a distinctly classicising treatment. Not only were the figures of Rosamond and Eleanor strongly idealised but they were placed against an architectural backdrop that, featuring a rounded arch and soaring Doric column, was markedly Roman in character.

The revival of interest in the ballad which Addison’s comments sparked, moreover, appears to have gathered particular momentum in the decade preceding the production of Penny’s exhibit. As such publications as Thomas Percy’s famous *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* from 1765 highlight, ballads increasingly came to be prized as vital components of antiquarian culture and thus as symbols of British cultural identity.<sup>192</sup> Indeed, the patriotic importance and historical value of English ballads were deeply intertwined, as they were held to offer an irreplaceable insight into the nation’s language and development. For instance, in the preface to his volume, Percy describes ballads as ‘reliques of antiquity’, stating that ‘[these] specimens of ancient poetry...shew the gradation of our language, exhibit the progress of popular opinion, display the peculiar manners and customs of former ages, or throw light on our earlier classical poets’.<sup>193</sup> Further stressing the historical

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<sup>191</sup> See Samuel Croxall, *The Novelist: Or, Tea-Table Miscellany. Containing the Select Novels of Dr Croxall; With Other Polite Tales and Pieces of Modern Entertainment* (2 vols) (London, 1766).

<sup>192</sup> For a stimulating discussion of the growing antiquarian interest which ballads came to hold at this time, particularly in relation to Thomas Percy’s seminal publication, see Dianne Dugaw, ‘The Popular Marketing of “Old Ballads”: The Ballad Revival and Eighteenth-Century Antiquarianism Reconsidered’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 21, no. 1 (autumn 1987): 71-90.

<sup>193</sup> Thomas Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry: Consisting of Old Heroic Ballads, Songs, and Other Pieces of Our Earlier Poets (Chiefly of the Lyric Kind); Together with Some Few of Later Date* (3 vols) (London, 1765), vol. 1, pp. ix-x.

and pedagogical importance of these wares, Percy's text also supplies lengthy commentaries on each of the published ballads, discussing their origins, style and factual authenticity. This suggests that the author, himself a respected poet, sought to accentuate the scholarly value of the ballad and so legitimate these common street-songs as ancient documents of British history and culture.

By looking back to what could be considered as the very origins of the Rosamond story in textual and visual form, Penny, we can therefore suggest, was capitalising on this growing enthusiasm for old ballads. Reproducing in paint what had previously been available only in graphic form, the artist's newest work essentially embodied a move from the printed page to the exhibition space. This means that, besides offering an image that was already highly familiar to Academy visitors, Penny's exhibit constituted a strikingly novel performance in paint. At the same time, in adapting the Rosamond story to the format of a painted work, the artist was translating an imagery which was thoroughly non-Academic into a production that was worthy of the new Academy. In this respect, Penny, like van der Gucht and Hayman before him, was also participating as a central agent in the gentrification of this theme—and thus its assimilation into high culture. Viewed in chronological sequence, the series of images we have considered strongly underline how Rosamond's treatment in visual culture was becoming increasingly dignified over time. Not only can Hayman's illustration be seen to have 'improved' upon van der Gucht's representation, which, in turn, improved upon the ballad woodcut, but Penny's work, through being conceived as a painted image and an Academy exhibit, improved upon all of these images once again. The artist's *Rosamond and Queen Eleanor*, in other words, positioned itself at the head of this long pictorial succession.

Ultimately, though, Penny's work does not simply stand as the culmination of what can be described as a process of visual refinement. As we have seen, Penny was drawing upon and reworking an imagery that, enjoying currency in a variety of artistic, theatrical and literary forms, operated across a wide range of pictorial genres. Having derived the essential formula for his piece from Addison and Hayman, the artist then culled the remaining narrative details for his scene from the earliest ballad and chapbook representations of Rosamond. Not only does this present an image of Penny as an artist who drew upon the models provided by a variety of different media, it also shows him as a practitioner who, seeking to portray

one of the most widely recognised subjects available, was trying to appeal to the broadest possible audience. As he had done in his earlier *The Blacksmiths*, then, the artist was once again seeking to ensure that the learned and ‘high’ aspects of his work would not compromise its wide-ranging popular appeal.

Penny’s quest to create a form of imagery that was both sufficiently dignified and ‘polite’ for the Academy and also rooted in more popular forms has striking affinities with Addison’s literary practice. By adapting the original ballad to the ‘high’ Italianate form of the opera, whilst using the English vernacular as his language, Addison – like Shakespeare before him – can be seen to have embraced a mode of writing that moved seamlessly between, and so fused, the opposing poles of ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture. This inherent duality, in fact, appears to have been both recognised and readily exploited by contemporaries: throughout its later performance history, the opera was paired with alternate ‘high’ tragic and ‘low’ comic productions (whereas the piece was paired with William Wycherley’s Restoration comedy *The Country Wife* in February 1745, it was coupled with Shakespeare’s classic tragedy *Macbeth* in April 1765).<sup>194</sup> Thus, Addison’s *Rosamond* strikingly foreshadowed Penny’s *Rosamond and Queen Eleanor* in more than subject: in both cases, the artist and the writer were seeking to raise the Rosamond story to the level of high art whilst still retaining that kernel of populist sincerity which was deemed as being central to the subject’s origins in native folklore.

Indeed, Addison’s persona as an accessible but polite author appears to have matched that of Penny’s as an accessible but suitability elevated artist. We can even, given the particular cultural model which Addison put forward in his capacity as periodical writer, view the author as Penny’s closest literary equivalent. As the founder of the highly successful *Spectator* (which, having run from March 1711 to December 1714, numbered an impressive 635 issues), Addison had articulated and transmitted a plethora of enlightened views and values to a broad urban audience.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> This information is given in the newspaper advertisements which appeared in the *General Advertiser*, 13 February 1745 and the *Public Advertiser*, 17 April 1765. For a full listing of the different stage productions with which *Rosamond* was paired in each respective season, see Arthur H. Scouten (ed.), *The London Stage, 1660-1800*, pt. 3: 1729-1747 (2 vols) (Carbondale, 1961), vol. 2, pp. 1149-75 and Stone (ed.), *The London Stage*, pt. 4, vol. 2, pp. 1110, 1237.

<sup>195</sup> For the best modern account of Addison’s periodical and its relation to ‘polite’ culture, see Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, pp. 100-107. See also Michael Ketchum, *Transparent Designs: Reading, Performance and Form in ‘The Spectator’ Papers* (Georgia, 1985); and Lawrence E. Klein, ‘Property and Politeness in the Early Eighteenth-Century Whig Moralists: The Case of “The

Eschewing the format of most traditional magazines, Addison's *Spectator* had presented its readers with a selection of articles devoted to the general cultivation of moral and cultural refinement. Embracing, almost in the manner of the popular conduct book, every aspect of contemporary taste and behaviour, these informal, conversational essays were designed to appeal to all types of reader, particularly, as Addison's aptly-imagined narrators Sir Roger de Coverley (a country squire) and Sir Andrew Freeport (a City merchant) make clear, London's rising professional and merchant classes. In the same way that Penny's works envisaged an ideal community of viewers bound together by their love of painting, the author's publication had promoted the idea that all members of the public could, by practising the art of politeness, achieve a consistent level of refinement and so join an increasingly prosperous community of equals. These similarities suggest that Penny's work can be assimilated to Addison's project to create a characteristically national form of high culture, and thus to contribute to the forging of a unified, patriotic community. Penny's exhibit, it would therefore seem, presented an ardently nationalistic production that sought to create a truly universal form of 'British' Academic art.

In this respect, the artist's decision to portray Rosamond is difficult to dissociate from the growing pressures Academy members were facing at this time to publically demonstrate their commitment to a so-called national school of painting. As we have seen, this was an aspect of the Academy's artistic programme that had, from its very beginnings, been highly contested. As the series of scathing satirical attacks that were published in the *Middlesex Journal* from June 1769 onwards indicate, the Academy was coming under severe criticism for its implied cosmopolitanism and distinctly Continental outlook.<sup>196</sup> Not only did the Academy, according to the journal's ironically-named writer 'Fresnoy', include too many foreign members but the institution's preferred mode of practice was one which, privileging the borrowing of Italianate 'high' art forms, was actively undermining any sense of a united, national school.<sup>197</sup>

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*Spectator*", in John Brewer and Susan Staves (eds.), *Early Modern Conceptions of Property* (London, 1996), pp. 221-33.

<sup>196</sup> See section 4 of my Introduction. This series of articles is also discussed at length in Solkin, *Painting for Money*, pp. 263-66.

<sup>197</sup> Besides complaining that, among the 'poor gentlemen' who made up the Academy, there was 'an healthful, hardy, well-cloath'd gang of foreigners and others, consisting of Danes, Germans, Americans, Scotch and Irish', the journal's writer can be seen to have condemned the Academy as a

Such pressures were clearly felt by many leading Academicians. If we turn to the space of the Academy exhibition itself, we find that other artists were employing comparably ‘British’ themes. One such practitioner – whom we have already touched upon in this respect – was Angelica Kauffman. As we have seen, Kauffman, upon arriving in London in 1766, fast became recognised as the principal exponent of an ultra-refined, distinctly ‘feminised’ mode of history painting. Typically, the artist’s works also featured subjects which were taken from native history and which dramatized comparably romantic encounters between ancient British kings and queens, as exhibits such as her *Vortigern and Rowena* from 1770 highlight. Of even greater significance, in that same year Reynolds himself appears to have looked to a similarly populist theme. Rather than portraying a ‘high’ literary topic as might be expected, Reynolds’s fifth Academy exhibit for that year depicted the story of *The Children in the Wood* (fig. 49)—the narrative that Addison had strikingly described as being ‘one of the darling Songs of the common People’, originating as it also had in the distinctive iconography of widely-popular street ballads.<sup>198</sup>

As these examples usefully highlight, antiquarian and popular histories had become a fertile source of ‘British’ subject matter for some of the Academy’s most prominent members. What set Penny apart from his competitors, however, was his willingness to use vernacular imagery – as well as literature – to frame his representation. Neither Reynolds nor Kauffman were prepared to sacrifice classical norms in their transposition of non-classical themes to the Academy exhibition. Reynolds, in particular, carefully distanced himself from the ‘lesser’ brand of imagery associated with ballad tradition by portraying his chosen theme in a characteristically idealising manner. Thus, even as his picture captured the story’s most affecting aspects, showing the two children lying abandoned and dead, being mournfully serenaded by a pair of red-breasted robins, it did not directly allude to the ‘low’ visual source from which it originated.<sup>199</sup> Moreover, considering that Reynolds’s image was exhibited

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‘fractious and arbitrary institution’, describing its exhibitions as little more than flashy ‘Parisian’ displays. See *The Middlesex Journal*, 6-8 July 1769; 8-10 February 1770; 3-5 May 1770.

<sup>198</sup> Bond (ed.), *The Spectator*, no. 85 (7 June 1711), vol. 1, pp. 360-64.

<sup>199</sup> Examples of the woodcuts which illustrated this story and which may have informed Reynolds’s image are provided by the following chapbook and ballad publications: Anon., *The Most Lamentable and Deplorable History of the Children in the Wood* (London, 1700); Anon., *The History of the Children in the Wood; Or Murder Revenged* (London, 1760); Anon., *The History of the Children in the Wood, Or the Norfolk Gentleman’s Last Will and Testament* (London, 1765). Comparing Reynolds’s painting to these strongly simplified and stylised productions, it is clear that the artist’s work operated in a very different pictorial register.

as part of an exhibition submission of seven full-length portraits, it appears that this painting, forming only a small portion of his repertoire, was self-consciously sidelined as a more minor exhibit. Penny, on the other hand, was unconstrained by such conventions, confidently fusing the distinctively British subject matter that he had introduced in his two earlier Academy exhibits with, for the first time in his exhibition career, an equally distinctive ‘British’ pictorial vocabulary. As one of the few Academicians who can be seen to have drawn openly on non-Academic pictorial precedents, Penny was not merely identifying himself as a member of the nation’s emergent school of painting. Rather, in reworking an imagery which had a long history in native culture and in placing his image at its apex, Penny, we can suggest, was strategically positioning his work at the forefront of a uniquely British visual tradition.

## II

Following the pattern set by his *Rosamond and Queen Eleanor*, Penny’s second exhibit for that year also pictured a decidedly nationalistic subject. In fact, portraying the highly topical episode of *Lord Clive Explaining to the Nabob the Situation of the Invalids in India* (fig. 50), this piece constituted an even more overtly patriotic production than the artist’s other exhibition work. Besides presenting a large cast of figures and thus being conceived as a grand-style historical work rather than as a small-scale genre scene, the image focused on a protagonist whose military pre-eminence was well known to contemporary viewers. Robert Clive, as one of the East India Company’s leading commanders, had played an instrumental role in securing British ascendancy in the subcontinent during his three periods of service in India (1744-53, 1754-60, and 1764-67).<sup>200</sup> Not only did he successfully overcome the

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<sup>200</sup> For the classic account of Clive’s military and political achievements in this period, see Sir John Malcolm (ed.), *The Life of Robert, Lord Clive: Collected from the Family Papers Communicated by the Earl of Powis* (3 vols) (London, 1836). Reliable modern studies include Mark Bence-Jones, *Clive of India* (London, 1974); Richard Garrett, *Robert Clive* (London, 1976); and Robert Harvey, *Clive: The Life and Death of a British Emperor* (London, 1998). For detailed contemporary accounts of Clive’s life and career, see Robert Orme, *A History of the Military Transactions of the British Nation in Indostan, from the Year MDCCXLV* (London, 1763) and Charles Caraccioli, *The Life of Robert Lord Clive, Baron Plassey* (4 vols) (London, 1775-77).

Nawab of Bengal, Siraj-ud-Daula, at the Battle of Plassey in 1757 (a pivotal victory for Britain, eradicating a longstanding and problematical imperial opponent), but he also secured the Diwani of Bengal (the right to collect revenues) from the Mughal Emperor in 1765, thereby consolidating British political and fiscal control of the province.<sup>201</sup>

In addition to these achievements, Clive had also become the principal promoter of the Company's Military Fund, a charity which, built on wealth accumulated from the East, was designed to help wounded and disabled soldiers, as well as the destitute widows of deceased servicemen.<sup>202</sup> As the agreement which was set up between the two parties on 6 April 1770 shows, the basis of the fund was a donation from Clive of £62833.6s.8d—the product of a bequest totalling five lacks of rupees that he had received from the former Bengali ruler Mir Jafar upon the latter's death in 1765. According to the agreement,

...Clive, being zealous for the Prosperity of the said Company, the Security of their Territories, and territorial Revenues in India, belonging to them, and their Trade and Commerce...hath proposed to the Court of Directors of the said United Company, to appropriate the Interest of the said five lacks of Rupees, for the support of a certain Number of Officers, Non-Commission Officers and Private Men, in the service of the said Company, who from Wounds, Length of Service, or Diseases Contracted during their service, were unable or unfit to serve any longer, and whose fortunes might be too scanty to afford the officers a decent, and the private men a comfortable subsistence in their native country, and also to make some provision for the widows of such officers and private men, as should have been intitled to the said Bounty, or whose Husbands should have lost their lives in the said United Company's service...<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> For the specific dynamics of Mir Jafar's reign, see H. V. Bowen, *Revenue and Reform: The Indian Problem in British Politics 1757-1773* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 5-6 and C. A. Bayly (ed.), *The Raj: India and the British, 1600-1947*, exh. cat. (London, National Portrait Gallery, 1990), p. 23.

<sup>202</sup> The Fund's terms are set out in the *Agreement Between the East-India Company and the Right Hon<sup>ble</sup> Lord Clive, Respecting the Military Fund, Dated 6 April 1770* (London, 1770).

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

The sum was then supplemented by a further gift of three lacks ‘as an Addition to the above-mentioned Fund’ from Mir Jafar’s son, Saif-ud-Daula, who had succeeded to the Nawab’s throne in 1766.<sup>204</sup>

Given that this was the first time that such a fund had been put in place to support discharged British soldiers who faced uncertain futures in Bengal, it is highly significant that Clive should have become its founder in 1770. Penny’s exhibit – most probably an informal commission from Clive himself – memorialised this pivotal moment and, seeking to convey the historical and cultural significance of Clive’s charitable action, his image dramatized the episode in appropriately spectacular terms.<sup>205</sup> Set, as the viewer is encouraged to imagine, in the military heartland of Bengal, the artist’s work shows Clive, as Governor-General of the province, soliciting from Saif-ud-Daula the further gift of three lacks made to the fund.<sup>206</sup> Bearing in his right hand what is, presumably, a document describing his project for the Military Fund and his own donation of five lacks of rupees, the General is simultaneously shown gesturing selflessly to a group of destitute soldiers whom the funds were intended to relieve.

By depicting this event and going on show in the period following Britain’s victories in the Seven Years’ War, Penny’s work, then, clearly announced itself as a thoroughly ‘British’ and patriotic production. Yet, as the scene it depicts clearly suggests, the artist’s image did not seek to communicate such an emphatically patriotic message through celebratory means alone. Imbued with a far greater level of subtlety, Penny’s painting inscribed a viewing experience which hinged on its evocation of the unifying ties of sympathy deemed central to the British Empire’s expansion. Thus, rather than involving his subject in a purely triumphal storyline that

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<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.* p. 5.

<sup>205</sup> Penny received payments totalling £200 for the painting from the Military Fund in early 1773: East India Company Court Minutes, British Library IOR/B/88, pp. 428, 548. However, Penny was initially given £150 and then complained that this amount was insufficient, suggesting that no price had been agreed in advance.

<sup>206</sup> The scene is misidentified as Najim-ad-Daula (Saif-ud-Daula’s elder brother and predecessor) bestowing Mir Jaffar’s legacy on Clive in the only sustained discussion of Penny’s picture in the scholarly literature: Hermione de Almeida and George H. Gilpin, *Indian Renaissance: British Romantic Art and the Prospect of India* (Aldershot, 2005), pp. 105-106. However, in the discussion of Penny’s solicitation for payment recorded in the East India Company’s Court Minutes, British Library IOR/B/88, p. 428, it is clearly identified as ‘Lord Clive’s receiving from the Nabob of Bengal the Grant of the Sum of Money which was applied to establish the Fund’; the Nawab in question is explicitly identified as Saif-ud-Daula in the *Agreement Between the East-India Company and the Right Hon<sup>ble</sup> Lord Clive*, p. 5.

aligned his victorious public identity with the space of destructive warfare, the artist portrayed Clive in a philanthropic and sentimental guise, virtuously ministering to the needs of fellow soldiers—a role recognised as fulfilling a common national purpose.

Moreover, through portraying the suggested encounter between Clive and Saif-ud-Daula as an act of convivial, even avuncular friendship, Penny can be seen to have tied his work to yet another pair of paintings by his favoured colleague Francis Hayman. Hayman's *The Humanity of General Amherst* (fig. 51) and *Robert Clive Meeting Mir Jafar After the Battle of Plassey, 1757* (fig. 52), produced in c.1760-61 and c.1761-62 respectively to hang in the Rotunda at Vauxhall Gardens, likewise evoked both the strength and the fundamental benevolence of British imperial expansion.<sup>207</sup> Prefiguring Penny's later image, the principal protagonists in both these works are shown readily renouncing martial valour in favour of clemency and sympathetic virtue. Just as Hayman's first piece dramatizes the affecting encounter between Amherst and a group of grief-stricken French subjects after the capture of Montreal, France's last bastion in Canada, in September 1760, his second work details the dramatic meeting of Clive with Mir Jafar in the aftermath of the Company's triumphant defeat of Siraj-ud-Daula at Plassey. As the accompanying, mythologizing description to the two paintings in the Vauxhall guidebook explained, both military commanders, being portrayed with their hands extended in open welcome and thus in poses suggestive of their modesty and affability, stood as apt metaphors for the fundamentally benign and civilising nature of British imperial victory.<sup>208</sup> In the same vein, Clive was characterised as successfully dispelling Mir Jafar's 'doubt and diffidence' through his unconstrained civility and 'attitude of Friendship'.<sup>209</sup>

Extending Hayman's corresponding images of Amherst and Clive as beneficent victors, Penny's painting also serves to situate its protagonist in a realm of peaceable sociability. Indeed, the artist's view of Clive securing the Nawab's grant, drawing as it does on the conventions of polite portraiture, doubles as a likeness of two

<sup>207</sup> Hayman's two paintings are discussed at length in Solkin, *Painting for Money*, pp. 192-99.

<sup>208</sup> The full passages relating to these images are quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 194-95; for the original texts, see the unpaginated Appendix, 'A Description of the Historical Picture in the Great Room, Painted by Mr Hayman', in Anon., *A Description of Vaux-Hall Gardens* and pp. 24-26.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, Appendix, not paginated.

cultivated and courtly individuals spontaneously engaging in refined conversation—an appropriate sequel to the somewhat tentative convergence of East and West visualised by Hayman’s earlier piece.<sup>210</sup> In the later image, however, Clive appears to evince a stately power not only commensurate to, but greater than, that of the sovereign whose attention he commands. Pictured this time in a stance borrowed from antique sculpture (at once connoting his ease of manner and gentlemanly poise, as well as implying a sense of arrested action) and shown dramatically dominating the picture space, Clive seemingly stands as the epitome of masculine resilience and magnanimity.<sup>211</sup> Like Hayman’s two paintings then, the overriding impression created by Penny’s work is that of its central subject as supreme imperial educator, instrumental – through his assured enactment of a universal charitable gesture – in enabling his equally benevolent ally to realise the highest purposes of government.

Significantly, this is also a theme that Penny himself had employed to great effect in his earlier portrait of *The Marquis of Granby Relieving a Sick Soldier* (fig. 10) of 1765. Focusing as it did on the humanitarian endeavours of another celebrated imperial hero, this work also provides a strikingly close model for the artist’s later scene. As we have seen, this painting, eschewing the trappings of conquest, sought to inscribe a narrative of ethical cause and effect aimed at positioning its subject at the heart of a greater moral project. Indeed, employing a similar tripartite narrative structure, with Granby posed as mediator between, on the one side, a cluster of officers and, on the other, the family group to whom he offers aid, Penny’s painting, like that of his later *Lord Clive*, operates to envision an ideal polity in which public duty and private inclination are appropriately aligned.<sup>212</sup>

As these examples show, Penny was, in his portrayal of Clive, tying his work to a series of precedents deriving not from the artistic culture of the Old Masters but from the recent painterly productions of the 1760s. Indeed, the artist’s image can be seen as the culmination of a distinctive series of modern historical paintings depicting

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<sup>210</sup> Penny’s image of Clive and Saif-ud-Daula can be closely compared with Reynolds’s eminently dignified portrait of *John, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Bute and his Secretary, Charles Jenkinson, Later Earl of Liverpool* from 1763. Looking to Penny’s later composition, Reynolds’s subjects are also shown, with outstretched hands, engaging in refined conversation. For a good quality reproduction of Reynolds’s picture, see Ellis Waterhouse, *Reynolds* (London, 1973), pl. 35.

<sup>211</sup> Clive’s pose finds a close precedent in the relaxed *contrapposto* of the Praxitelean ‘Hermes of Andros’ (British Museum, London). For an image of this sculpture, see Phyllis Pray Bober, *Renaissance Artists and Antique Sculpture* (London, 1986), pl. 10a.

<sup>212</sup> See Solkin, *Painting for Money*, pp. 199-206, and section 3 of my Introduction above.

scenes of martial benevolence, which can be traced from Hayman to his own earlier depictions of *Wolfe* and *Granby*. It might also seem, at least at first sight, to be the most successful, displaying a level of technical mastery and maturity that marks a significant advance over the earlier works. It is noteworthy that contemporary critics lauded Penny's effective handling of Clive's action, and particularly his depiction of the ailing soldiers. One critic, writing in the *Middlesex Journal*, declared that 'This piece shews, that Mr Penny was not advanced to the professorship from partiality or favour, but merely in consequence of his real merit', and further noted that the artist's individual portraits of the depicted soldiers were 'excellent pictures of distress'.<sup>213</sup> Similarly, the *Morning Chronicle*'s correspondent praised the painting for its effective composition and its accurate detail: 'This piece is well grouped', he noted, 'and the costume well observed, both in the dresses of the Indians and Europeans; want and disease in the faces of the invalids, are likewise very powerfully marked'. At the same time, however, he objected that the principal figure of Lord Clive, although 'reckoned an excellent likeness' was 'neither expressive of humanity [n]or dignity'.<sup>214</sup>

There is perhaps a hint of sarcasm in the final comment that the representation of Clive as 'neither expressive of humanity or dignity' was an 'excellent likeness'. Penny's hero, it seems to suggest, was not quite the paragon of benevolence that his generous action suggested he should be. The critic's comments, in other words, hint at certain internal inconsistencies within Penny's image that demand further exploration. The most obvious, perhaps, is the depiction of Clive himself. Instead of being visibly moved by the scene of distress, he, as the critic clearly realised, appears remote and almost impersonal—much the same, in fact, as in the General's other portraits from this period. Turning to the trio of likenesses that were produced between his initial return to Britain after Plassey in 1760 and the completion of Penny's painting twelve years later, we find an imagery that displays few obvious affinities with the culture of sensibility and sympathy so important to Penny's characteristic mode of practice. Presenting Clive as, in turn, a classical soldier-statesman (Peter Scheemakers (fig. 53)), an aristocrat-adventurer (Charles Clive (fig. 54)) and a gentlemanly military officer (Nathaniel Dance-Holland (fig. 55)), these

<sup>213</sup> *The Middlesex Journal*, 25-28 April 1772.

<sup>214</sup> *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 4 May 1772.

divergent representations vividly convey the range of self-images to which he aspired. Consideration of the particular representational discontinuities between the second and third portrait, for instance, reveals that Clive was at one moment defined by a highly flamboyant, almost theatrical display of power and wealth, and at the next, portrayed as a straightforward but assured figure, distinguishable from a typical country gentleman by his military uniform alone.

In his image, Penny seems to have been seeking to reconcile elements of all three models: the classicising dignity evident in Clive's stance; the aristocratic superiority implicit in the hand that gestures towards the invalids; and the gentlemanly assurance of his facial expression, so close to the subtle half-smile detectable in Dance-Holland's portrait. None, however, were truly compatible with the impression of acute emotional sensitivity – indeed vulnerability – which assured the coherence of his earlier portrayal of Granby's virtuous conduct. Clive emerges as, at best, fulfilling the role of disinterested imperial administrator, a position that implies a level of emotional neutrality difficult to reconcile with the sympathetic feelings central to Penny's model of martial benevolence.

There are related issues with the portrayal of both Saif-ud-Daula and the wider setting in which the figures are placed. Penny, of course, possessed no first-hand experience of the Indian subcontinent, meaning that one of the most significant challenges entailed by his work was that of credibly representing an Indian subject. Judging by the scrupulously exact representation of the Nawab's lavish costume, jewellery and weaponry, Penny must have managed to gain access to authentic Indian artefacts, presumably through the agency of one of the Company's agents, perhaps even Clive himself. For his likeness of Saif-ud-Daula and his entourage, however, it would seem that Penny had recourse to equivalent courtly figures from imported Indian miniatures. As Natasha Eaton notes, Britain's gradual colonisation of India had, by the 1770s, sparked a fervent metropolitan vogue for the collecting of exotic artefacts which centred upon Indian images.<sup>215</sup> Miniatures appropriated from the ancient Mughal courts – objects displaying an uncommon lustre and designed as part of elaborate albums for private consumption alone – were prized as luxury commodities and fetishized for their rarity and authenticity as markers of 'true'

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<sup>215</sup> Natasha Eaton, 'Nostalgia for the Exotic: Creating an Imperial Art in London, 1750-1793', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 39, no. 2 (2006): 227-50.

Eastern culture. Penny's work clearly sought to exploit this trend. As comparison with a traditional Bengali miniature of a Nawab holding court (fig. 56) demonstrates, the artist's image utilised a characteristically stylised, almost two-dimensional figural stance to envisage the Indian ruler turned in profile. But, as Penny's actual portrait of Clive testifies, his reputation as a modern metropolitan artist was built upon a highly particularised and naturalistic painterly style. This was an approach that did not fit easily with the more abstracted mode of representation promoted by its Eastern equivalent. Despite underpinning key facets of his subjects' nationhood, therefore, the artist's somewhat awkward synthesis of two very different pictorial codes serves to disrupt the stylistic coherence of the work, and with it, the painting's representational authority.

Moreover, the determined disposition ascribed to Clive combines with the emotionless exactitude of the Nawab's portrait to create an exaggerated contrast with the invalid soldiers, resulting in a discomfiting tension between an ideal state of masculine autonomy and control on the one hand and a total loss of self-possession on the other. Awkward and emasculated, the soldiers' crumpled and inert forms connote a degree of resignation and defeat that appears too far removed from the experience of their seemingly self-contained benefactors. Indeed, disengaged and physically disconnected from the other figures, these men, as the victims of imperial warfare, seem lost on the margins of the greater colonial community that Penny's piece supposedly imagined.

Further compromising the narrative integrity of Penny's painting is the schematic nature of the representation of an Anglo-Indian citadel in the background. Whereas Hayman deftly capitalised on the contemporary curiosity for exotic, distant places by incorporating an evocative, indeed fantastical setting in his work, Penny preferred the low and austere forms of a Company fortress, with the rest of his canvas being obliquely filled with an expanse of sky. Why then, if the artist had readily emphasised aspects such as his subjects' varying dress for example, did he choose to deploy such a utilitarian setting for the envisioned encounter between Eastern and Western benevolence? It does little to enhance the affective power of the image; indeed, with no adequate framing device, Clive appears to be gesturing into nothingness, robbing his action of its full meaning. Finally, by lacking any hint of exoticism or remoteness, this prosaic backdrop makes almost too tangible Clive's

and the Nawab's lack of overt emotional response to the pitifully distressed state of the discharged soldiers. Thus, Penny's work ultimately generates the view of two differentiated temporalities, existing in a state of mutual exclusion rather than of sympathetic engagement.

The artist's inscription of Clive's charitable undertaking was made still more problematic by the uneasy relation set up between the supposedly virtuous impulse that inspired the General's act and the Nawab's gift, and the overtly commercial transactions that had enabled it. Clive's donation of such a large sum of money to the fund was inextricably linked to the greater mercantile activities of his employer, which was both the nation's most powerful trading organisation and a major agent in imperial expansion. With almost 3,000 agents (over ten times the number at its founding in 1600), and a vast overseas trade, the corporation was now the dominant trading company in the Indies.<sup>216</sup> Furthermore, since the Seven Years' War, when overseas commercial interests became a focus of the struggle between England and France, the Company had abandoned the relatively peaceable conduct characteristic of its early history and become increasingly willing to use military force to protect its immunities, privileges and markets.<sup>217</sup> On this foundation, and in large part through Clive's military successes, the Company's influence in India had grown to such an extent that it was able to exercise authority over wide tracts of territory, first in Bengal and then, increasingly, across the north-east and south of the subcontinent. In fact, the Company's expansion as a military power at this point became central to its trading operation.<sup>218</sup> India now appeared to present Britain with limitless material possibilities and the East India Company was determined to reap the benefits through any means necessary.

The aggressively commercial form that the 'new' Company took was given full visibility at the corporation's offices at Leadenhall Street (acquired in 1710) in the City of London.<sup>219</sup> Every element of the imposing site that constituted India House was designed to convey a certain image of the Company. Aside from significantly enlarging the structure of the existing building as a statement of its enduring

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<sup>216</sup> See Bayly (ed.), *The Raj*, pp. 19, 63.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>219</sup> For a brief history of the premises, see Mildred Archer, *The India Office Collection of Paintings and Sculpture* (London, 1986), pp. 1-4.

presence, the Company also sought to advertise its successes in India through the commissioning of grand art work to decorate its interior spaces. Six large-scale landscapes of important Company settlements were commissioned for the Directors' Courtroom, while Peter Scheemakers was appointed to create a series of statues for the General Court Room of the Company generals whose exceptional military feats had consolidated Company power in India.<sup>220</sup> Perhaps the most striking visual marker of the Company's preferred self-image, however, was Michael Rysbrack's bas-relief overmantel depicting *Britannia Receiving the Riches of the East* (fig. 57). One of the first decorative elements to be produced for the improved offices, the piece shows Britannia seated beneath a rocky outcrop and looking towards the personification of India, who approaches from the East proffering a casket of jewels. The idea clearly being advanced by Rysbrack was that of the subcontinent as a natural cornucopia, disgorging a ceaseless bounty seemingly devised for Britain's taking.

Forced by the nature of his commission to participate in the Company's complacently self-interested form of imperial iconography, Penny could not easily accommodate his representation to the imagery of polite and virtuous sensibility. The deeper commercial tensions that Clive's controversial involvement with the East India Company clearly elicited were instead inevitably registered on the surface of the artist's painting. In particular, the exuberant physicality of Saif-ud-Daula's Eastern cohort became an effective signifier for the effusive materiality of the fortune that had been gifted to Clive and which formed the basis of the Military Fund's resources. Like the mythic cornucopia readily offering up its abundant produce for consumption, Mir Jafar's overwhelming generosity towards Clive and his son's subsequent gift acquired significance as part of the unchecked and even excessive flow of India's resources into British hands. Seen in this way, the exchange of riches envisioned by Penny places Clive in a role equivalent to Rysbrack's Britannia, blithely scooping up the wealth of the East for both his and the Company's benefit. 'Virtue' in the guise of the Company's disabled troops has become completely side-lined. The result, paradoxically, is that the very ease with which wealth could apparently be acquired further undermined the need for sincere sympathetic emotion to motivate its benevolent dispensation.

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<sup>220</sup> The various artworks that were produced for India House are detailed in *ibid.*, p. 2.

As if to compensate for the multiple ambiguities intrinsic to Clive's supposedly benevolent act, Penny placed, in the gap between the two opposing sides of his painting, a distinct variant of the traditional personification of Charity. Possessing particular historical resonance through its endorsement by Cesare Ripa in his influential reference work *Iconologia* (fig. 58) and subsequent employment by a long line of history painters, the allegorical emblem of compassionate motherhood was intended to affirm the veracity of Clive's charitable endeavour. Indeed, to underscore the depth of need to which Clive is apparently responding, this vision of charity has been subverted: the mother is shown in a state of doleful lassitude, her poverty rendering her incapable of responding to the needs of her children, who pleadingly paw at her arm. Thus, the traditional symbol of abundant generosity has become yet another symbol of feminine virtue in distress, in need of benevolent masculinity to secure her redemption. But visibly pushed backwards within the picture space to make way for the principal figure groups, she appears to be a marginal and insubstantial figure. Her vulnerability further forms a discordant contrast with the weaponry that anchors the foreground: a mortar standing to the left, ready to defend Britain's prize, and a freshly discarded cannon towards the centre, an all-too-obvious reminder of the force thus far exerted in the Company's quest to subdue the subcontinent. The contradictions of empire are therefore imminent at multiple levels within the representation, inserting into Penny's apparently unambiguous representation a degree of dubiety no painterly contrivance could efface.

The ambiguities of empire, however, did not simply serve to undermine the integrity of Penny's attempt to revive his imagery of martial benevolence; they soon drew him into a much broader and more damaging set of discourses. In a letter to the *Evening Post* of 14-16 May 1772, Penny's image became the butt of a witheringly sarcastic commentary that, for the first time in the artist's career, publicly called into question the moral integrity of his practice. Beginning with a seemingly flattering description of Penny's image, it complimented 'the air of this great General's head, the elegance of his deportment, together with that humanity so expressive in his countenance'. Indeed, the artist's depiction of Clive not only 'communicated that fine sympathy [that] one would always wish to feel on such occasions', but also prompted the

viewer ‘to hope some more of the celebrated actions of this great man may be given to the world’.<sup>221</sup>

The anonymous correspondent – supposedly writing from Leadenhall Street, the address of the East India Company’s head office – then went on to give an example of one of these ‘celebrated actions’. He begins by evoking a majestic scene in which Clive and the former Nawab of Bengal, Siraj-ud-Daula, swear a solemn oath of alliance with each other: Clive should be portrayed ‘with a *Bible* in one hand, and the other on his *heart* calling God and our Saviour to witness faithfully to observe a treaty of peace and amity, whilst the [Nawab] was pledging him on the Koran at the same time, and to the same effect’. He then goes on to suggest that a background vignette should include a ‘scene in *chiaro oscuro*’ showing Clive making a secret agreement ‘subversive of those entered into in the foreground’ with an officer in the Nawab’s army, Yar Khan Latty, to depose Siraj-ud-Daula, ‘Lord Clive’s *late sworn friend*’. Beside it, there should be a further figure group, representing the assassination of Siraj-ad-Daula during his flight from the battle of Plassey, by order of Mir Jafar.

The writer’s account is somewhat laconic, but it is clear enough that he is referring to the circumstances leading up to the Battle of Plassey, Clive’s great victory over the forces of Bengal. The battle, he is making clear, was won by treachery, as Mir Jafar, supposedly an ally and vassal of Siraj-ad-Daula but in fact party to a secret conspiracy with Clive, had agreed to withdraw his battalions from the battle at the last moment, thus leaving the rest of the Nawab’s army at the mercy of the British forces. Clive, the letter’s author clearly implies, was a dishonourable and dishonest double-dealer, a man whose military reputation was built on sheer deceit.

This criticism, however, was only part of a growing avalanche of invective that was being directed towards the Company’s commercial, political and military conduct. In fact, as such satirical prints as *The Peace Makers of India* (fig. 59), reproduced in the *Political Register* for February 1770, make clear, public concerns over the inadequacy of Company rule in India had been growing for some time. Presenting a scene of unbridled cruelty, this engraving constitutes a powerful critique of the volatility and violence of empire. With its shockingly vivid portrait of the British

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<sup>221</sup> *London Evening Post*, 14-16 May 1772.

General Joseph Smith turning his back on the myriad atrocities being performed by Company employees, the image forcibly conveys the degree to which Clive's employer was recognised as mismanaging the judicial systems of the subcontinent and thus exacerbating an already fractious political situation.<sup>222</sup>

Only weeks before Penny's painting went on display, moreover, Clive himself became a focal point of the rising public outcry against East India Company rapacity.<sup>223</sup> Forced to testify to the House of Commons in response to an enquiry which proved a direct challenge to the legitimacy of his Indian actions and fortune, the British officer was exposed to severe criticism. Scanning the various newspaper commentaries that appeared at the time, we find that, even though Clive, standing before the parliamentary committee on 31 March 1772, gave a 'sensible speech' which lasted for more than two hours, he was nevertheless vilified for his conduct.<sup>224</sup> For instance, in two letters written by 'Junius Asiaticus' and published in the *Public Advertiser* on 11 April and 1 May 1772, Clive was denounced for lacking any real merit and for having obtained his fortune by dangerously divisive means. As the first letter proclaims,

Those who are either unacquainted with the History of Indian Affairs, or have been misled by some writers on that subject (who have through Adulation, Fear, or Misinformation, planted Laurels, instead of Hemp, on the Brow of that Mock-Hero) may erroneously imagine, that our vast Eastern Acquisitions, and the great Revenue resulting therefrom, were all achieved by his extraordinary Abilities and Prowess; but the Fact is the very Reverse.

Clive's misdemeanours were subject to still more scathing criticism in the second piece:

It is universally manifest that this *fortuitous Lord* derives every Particle of his fraudulent Fortune, and all the undeserved Rank and Consequence which now distinguish him, from the misplaced Powers and Trust reposed in him by the East India Company... And what facilitated his Advancement too, was his

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<sup>222</sup> For more on the growing crisis surrounding the East India Company at this time, see Bowen, *Revenue and Reform*, pp. 95-102, 119-32.

<sup>223</sup> Clive had, by this time, amassed a fortune worth over £500,000, making him the Company's wealthiest employee. See Garrett, *Robert Clive*, pp. 165-76.

<sup>224</sup> Quoted in the *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 1 April 1772.

possessing a Heart unrestrained by Philanthropy and Virtue, which rendered him capable of such Enterprises, as would have made the Feelings of Honour and Humanity Revolt!... In short, he grossly perverted all [the] great intentions [of his employer] to the sordid Purposes of his own Lucre, which was his sole scope.

To this writer, Clive was little more than a dubious imperial racketeer. Far from standing as an exemplary military hero, the British officer had come to be seen as a greedy and contemptible tyrant.

The extent to which Penny himself was aware of the potential dangers of making a character like Clive into an exemplar of charitable conduct is unclear; it seems likely, however, that he was inclined to believe the General's own protestations to Parliament that his motives were generous and his conduct at all times honourable, for it is difficult otherwise to account for his willingness to exhibit his painting at this time. But the true irony of his situation was to become still more apparent after the controversy broke. For if we turn to the evidence that emerged from Clive's attempt to defend his conduct and the subsequent reply made by his longstanding Company enemy, John Johnstone, it becomes apparent that even the basic premise of Penny's painting was lacking in authority.

The material facts are as follows. Clive had declared that it was his indubitable legal right to receive Mir Jafar's legacy but that he had decided to use it for the purpose of establishing a Fund for the benefit of impoverished Company servants, before describing how he had subsequently 'prevailed upon [Saif-ud-Daula] to bestow' a further sum of £40,000 upon the Fund.<sup>225</sup> Johnstone, however, pointed out that there was no mention of Mir Jafar's supposed legacy of five lacks of rupees until some months after Clive's arrival in India, which itself took place some four months after the Nawab's death and after the succession of his eldest son, Najim-ud-Daula.<sup>226</sup> The additional three lacks from Saif-ud-Daula, we should then note, were given after his subsequent accession to the throne in succession to Najim-ud-Daula in 1767. Clive had by his own account paid the sums into the Calcutta treasury himself, and received the credit notes in his own name in 1765-67; but it had taken him until 1770

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<sup>225</sup> Clive described the meeting in his parliamentary speech of March 1772, printed as *Lord Clive's Speech in the House of Commons, on the Motion Made for an Inquiry into the Nature, State, and Condition, of the East India Company* (London, 1772), pp. 40-41.

<sup>226</sup> Speech reported in *The London Packet, or New Evening Post*, Friday 3 April 1772.

to establish the Military Fund. Moreover, when the Fund was established the terms of the agreement made it clear that the money would revert to Clive himself should his massive pension or *Jagir* from the Nawab, totalling some £27,000 per annum, cease to be paid at any time before its expiry in 1784.<sup>227</sup> Finally, it should be borne in mind that it was customary for new Nawabs to give generous ‘gifts’ – essentially bribes – to the Company’s leading representatives to ensure their smooth accession to the throne; but that the acceptance of such large gifts had been prohibited since 1765 as the sums of money changing hands had reached proportions both scandalous and politically destabilising during the Seven Years’ War.<sup>228</sup>

The implication of these facts seems very clear: that, in both cases, the sums used to establish the Military Fund were the customary ‘gifts’ of the new Nawabs – first Mir Jafar’s eldest son, Najim-ud-Daula, then his younger brother, Saif-ud-Daula – to Clive, then the most powerful Company representative in India, with the first disguised as a legacy to exempt it from the prohibition on receiving gifts and the second retrospectively reinterpreted as a donation to Clive’s military fund. Only when he had returned to England and the pressure of public opinion began to rise did Clive decide to dispose of the money for a charitable purpose and thus disguise its questionable origins, in the process seeking to use it to guarantee his much more substantial income from the *Jagir*. Thus, it appears that the very event that Penny had depicted was nothing more than a fiction, a mirage of benevolence conjured up in the bright but blinding sun of Britain’s imperial dawn. And if we turn to the claim made by Clive on behalf of the Fund, in his recent parliamentary speech, that ‘Nothing was wanting but such an Establishment as this, to make the East India Company’s Military Service the best in the world’, with its soldiers now ‘upon the same footing as those in Chelsea Hospital’, we find another illusion.<sup>229</sup> There was no such ‘Chelsea Hospital’ for these men, the servants of a private corporation which should yet have been capable of funding their relief from its own profits—only the office in which Penny’s painting was destined to hang.

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<sup>227</sup> On the preservation of the *Jagir* as Clive’s principal motivation throughout his later career, see Bruce Lenman and Philip Lawson, ‘Robert Clive, the “Black Jagir”, and British Politics’, *The Historical Journal*, vol. 26 no. 4 (1983): 801-829; for the reversion of the funds, see *Agreement between the East-India Company and the Right Hon<sup>ble</sup> Lord Clive*, p. 10.

<sup>228</sup> John A. Allan and Sir T. Wolseley Haig, *The Cambridge Shorter History of India* (3 vols) (Cambridge and New York, 1934), p. 563.

<sup>229</sup> See *Lord Clive’s Speech*, p. 41.

### III

Given the narrative and compositional complexities of Penny's *Rosamond and Queen Eleanor* and *Lord Clive*, it is clear that the artist's Academy submission for 1772 was intended to comprise a particularly compelling and evocative exhibition combination. On one level, Penny's paintings shared a number of fundamental characteristics. Firstly, both exhibits drew on emphatically 'British' and thus ardently patriotic subjects. The artist's first image, as we have seen, documented the relation between two notable members of Britain's early medieval court. Its companion, meanwhile, detailed the exploits of a well-known military leader whose achievements were central to the country's growing international status. In addition, Penny's two pieces dramatized themes which were highly familiar to viewers and which held increasing sentimental appeal. Just as the artist's first work pictured a heroine who, by the tragic nature of her story, ranked as a recognisably affecting figure, his second piece, showcasing Clive's benevolent deed, was clearly intended to have a similarly intense emotional impact on its audience.

These thematic correspondences were reinforced by a common compositional device that was designed to heighten the aesthetic impact of both images. Inviting an almost text-like reading of the scenes represented, the artist's paintings split the unfolding action of their respective storylines into two related parts. Whilst one protagonist, as the primary initiator of the action, is depicted with an outstretched arm to the left of each image, the recipient of this character's gesture is shown to the right. Thus, closely echoing his *Rosamond and Queen Eleanor*, the figures in Penny's *Lord Clive* are likewise distributed across two distinct pictorial zones, with the divide between them bridged by the main protagonist's unifying gesture. Like the iconic arrangement of Eleanor thrusting the goblet of poison towards the younger heroine, the artist's second exhibit also hinges on the potent interchange set up between Clive as the principle agent and the group of destitute soldiers destined to receive his charitable offering at the opposite side of the canvas. Penny's two pieces, in other words, not only employed comparable narrative models but inscribed modes of

viewing which, culminating in the overtly sentimental forms of a weak and defenceless heroine and a disengaged and visibly distressed body of demobilised soldiers, actively elicited the spectator's emotional and sympathetic involvement with the characters' individual plight. That the artist's *Lord Clive* also included, in its use of the figure of Charity, an analogous emblem of feminised sentiment, adds greater weight to the idea that this pair of paintings could be consumed and appreciated as a visually coherent assemblage.

Indeed, these two images should arguably be understood as having constituted a single project on Penny's part. Setting a scene of imminent tragedy beside one of renewal and rescue, the artist's exhibits can be seen as pictorial counterweights to one other and thus as carefully coordinated pendant pieces. Moreover, it is also apparent that, by producing such a deftly balanced pairing, Penny was self-consciously aligning his submission with the two strands of imagery – one focusing on sentimentalised female protagonists (as exemplified in the work of Reynolds and Kauffman) and the other focusing on chivalrous male protagonists (as exemplified in the work of West) – which had come to dominate the Academy's early displays. In this sense, the artist's decision to show these paintings as a pair can further be ascribed to his desire to satisfy the varied tastes of the institution's public and so play the Pall Mall exhibition space to the full. But, if Penny's pieces appear to present two complementary and interrelated productions, they also offered striking alternatives to each other. By visualising two subjects of alternate genders and placing them in spaces indicative of their differing cultural roles, the artist's pair of pictures embodied a greater series of contrasts. For instance, whereas Penny's first piece, promoting a quintessentially privatised and feminine form of imagery, presents a modestly scaled vision of an affectingly tragic episode, his second work, promoting a characteristically public and masculine form of imagery, portrays an increasingly aggrandised and decidedly militaristic scene. Thus, rather than positioning its subjects within the kind of enclosed and otherworldly realm that his *Rosamond and Queen Eleanor* so successfully imagined, Penny's *Lord Clive* places its cast of characters in a public – and uncompromisingly militarised – space. In the same vein, the artist's second exhibit substitutes an overtly picturesque motif, the central detail of Rosamond's discarded lute, with a selection of abandoned – and eminently unromantic – military weapons. Underlining the works' differing

characters to a further degree, we can also say that, in pairing his view of Queen Eleanor and Rosamond with a representation of Clive, Penny was essentially pitching a scene that was historical and literary against one that was startlingly contemporary and actual—a difference that was articulated with even greater force by the protagonists' sharply contrasting dress styles. Even as the artist's pieces appeared to be tied to comparable sentimental and patriotic narratives, both works, operating within the limits of two conflicting pictorial categories, comprised very different historical formulations.

Penny's audacious conjoining of two such diverse models was not, of course, a new feature of his work. The artist had already pursued a similar strategy to great effect with his earlier *The Death of General Wolfe* and *A Scene Taken from Swift's 'Description of a City Shower'*, another widely differing pair of images which, as we have seen, graced the walls of the Society of Artists' exhibition room in 1764. Moreover, it is also apparent that Penny's newest exhibits, in seeking to evoke two alternate 'male' and 'female' worlds, looked back to the examples provided by his *The Marquis of Granby Relieving a Sick Soldier* and *Imogen Discovered in the Cave*. Considering these continuities, we can suggest that the artist's pairing did not simply perpetuate two of the painterly modes to which, over the course of his career, he had devoted so much attention; the pieces also developed those techniques and formulas for which he had become most famous as an artist.

Importantly, however, Penny's portrait of Clive did not represent a model to which he would return. Having taken his practice in such a problematic and controversial direction, the artist seemed subsequently to avoid all subject matter that was tied so intimately to the deeds of 'great men' whose reputations were dangerously prone to reversal. Moreover, by the 1770s, the victories of the Seven Years' War were fading from memory to be replaced by deep-seated anxieties about its financial legacy, most notably in the form of the country's immense National Debt. In this context, imagery such as that of Penny's *Lord Clive* must have appeared to be increasingly out of date, and we find practitioners such as Reynolds and West moving away from an imagery which focused on contemporary military subjects (neither Academician exhibited another 'modern-day' martial portrait until the 1780s). Of even greater importance in determining the shape of the artist's future practice, however, was the painting's highly unsatisfactory afterlife. Whilst the scene that his *Rosamond and Queen*

*Eleanor* envisaged was reproduced as an engraving and re-exhibited in this form at the Society of Artists in 1774, Penny's *Lord Clive*, failing to become a print, was consigned to the East India Company's Lime Street offices where it hung in obscurity, disempowered and forgotten.<sup>230</sup>

It was not, then, this grander public painting which, denied a second showing in graphic form, proved to be the more enduring image, but its simpler and more modest companion. The uncomplicated and affecting alternative provided by *Rosamond and Queen Eleanor* – based on an accessible and equally 'British' subject while avoiding all the tensions of military conflict and empire – signalled the way forward. Nevertheless, the overt connection with the concerns of the contemporary world and the distinctive focus on virtuous conduct evinced by imagery such as *Lord Clive* remained, at least potentially, highly effective tools for engaging exhibition audiences. It was Penny's relentless search for a way of combining these different strands of his practice that – as I will argue over the final two chapters of this thesis – became the defining purpose of his subsequent exhibition career.

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<sup>230</sup> Smith's engraving was exhibited as part of a larger portfolio of prints reproducing a variety of contemporary images. See Ellen G. D'Oench, *Copper into Gold: Prints by John Raphael Smith 1751-1812* (New Haven and London, 1999), pp. 192-93. The Lime Street site, removed from the corporation's principle offices in Leadenhall Street, housed the Company's Military Fund. See the East India Company Court Minutes for 8 August 1770, British Library IOR/B/86, pp. 116-17.

## CHAPTER THREE

### ‘HISTORY’, ‘GENRE’ AND THE REFORM OF MODERN LIFE

In 1773, for the first time since the Academy exhibitions began, Penny chose to exhibit no works at all, presumably to enable him to pause and reconsider his exhibition strategy in light of the unwonted and unwelcome controversy that followed the public display of his *Lord Clive*. By the following year, however, he was ready to submit his response in the form of two exceptionally ambitious and innovative subject pieces, *The Profligate Punished by Neglect and Contempt* and *The Virtuous Comforted by Sympathy and Attention*. Depicting a virtuous female and a profligate male as they endure ill-health in radically differing ways, these works are notable as the artist’s first explicit exhibition pairing. Moreover, with their bold depiction of recognisably contemporary figures in familiar domestic settings and their strongly moralising tone, they stand out no less strikingly from the submissions of Penny’s leading contemporaries.

Indeed, there seems to have been no directly comparable images at the Academy in that year. Scanning the pages of the exhibition catalogue, we find the usual plethora of portraits set alongside a smattering of landscape, marine and animal pieces, together with a number of ambitious historical paintings that sustained the Academy’s commitment to Continental ‘grand manner’ art. Works such as James Barry’s *Antiochus and Stratonice*, Cipriani’s *Perseus Unchaining Andromeda on the Rock*, Nathaniel Dance’s *Orpheus Lamenting the Loss of Eurydice*, and Angelica Kauffman’s *Penelope Invoking Minerva’s Aid for the Safe Return of Telemachus* amply demonstrate the extent to which both senior Academicians and their aspiring younger counterparts still looked to replicate Italianate models to raise the status of their exhibits. Penny’s images, by contrast, were more indebted to the Dutch genre tradition and to Hogarth’s ‘modern moral subject’ paintings and, as such, represented his most determined attempt yet to create an accessible form of imagery that would nevertheless constitute a dignified alternative to the Academy’s predominantly classicising conventions.

A similar pattern is apparent in Penny's next Academy submission. After absenting himself from the exhibition of 1775, he returned the following year with another self-consciously spectacular work, *Jane Shore Led to Do Penance at St. Paul's: The Insolent in Office and Pretenders to Purity, By Mistreating the Wretched Betray their Own Baseness*. Depicting the mistreatment of Edward IV's erstwhile mistress at the hands of Richard III, this work appears at first sight to be far more conventional than his paired submissions of 1774 – after all, Angelica Kauffman had been contributing British historical subjects to the Academy almost since its inception. This would, however, fail to do justice to the singularity of Penny's image: not only is it one of the largest works the artist ever painted – second only to *Imogen Discovered in the Cave* in scale – but its complex multiple-figural composition marks it out as a uniquely daring experiment. Moreover, with its overtly moralising subtitle, there are also good reasons to think that the artist wished his viewers to once again acknowledge an underlying didactic purpose in his latest submission.

Thus, Penny's Academy exhibits in the four years after 1772 followed a distinctive pattern, in which each of his unwonted absences from the exhibition arena were followed by the submission of exceptionally sophisticated works united by a characteristic moralising agenda. Representing potential models to fill the void left in the wake of *Lord Clive*, the three works he submitted in this period represent a determined attempt at artistic self-reinvention. As such, they demand especially close and detailed analysis, both in their own right and as the major documents of a period of fundamental transition in Penny's later career. It is to these paintings, therefore, that this thesis will now turn.

## I

In Penny's *The Profligate Punished by Neglect and Contempt* (fig. 60), we are presented with the view of a gout-ridden male figure who, evidently incapacitated as a result of his illness, is seated in an expensive-looking armchair with his right leg propped awkwardly on a gout stool. Even though the man, appearing to be situated

in his parlour, is respectably attired, his clothes are ill-fitting and untidy. Not only is his waistcoat too tight for him but his breeches and stockings are indecorously pushed back on one leg to reveal a bare kneecap. Pointedly avoiding our gaze, he is depicted turning his head towards a voluptuous though similarly dishevelled maidservant who, distracted by the attentions of the manservant beside her, is shown pouring boiling water from a kettle onto her master's leg. From his angry expression and tightly clenched fists, it is clear that the man, suffering intense pain, has become increasingly exasperated and enraged by his inability to attract the notice of his two careless servants. His predicament, furthermore, appears to go unnoticed by his mistress who, consuming a glass of alcohol, is shown standing with her back to him in the far right-hand corner of the image and the young boy, probably his son, pictured stealing his father's purse from the table to the left.

Setting up a sharp contrast with this picture, the artist's *The Virtuous Comforted by Sympathy and Attention* (fig. 61) advances a strikingly dissimilar view of domestic life. Here, we find an elegant and immaculately-dressed female figure who, albeit pictured in the comparable role of an immobilised invalid, displays none of the aggression or ill-will of her gout-ridden male counterpart. Seated, this time, in a plainer armchair that is located within her bedchamber, Penny's female character assumes an upright and decorous pose, appearing to be both comfortable and contented in her familial surroundings. With her left hand held generously in front of her, she is shown gesturing towards an informally-attired and unshaven male figure, whose anxious expression suggests that he is her husband.<sup>231</sup> Unlike the gouty protagonist's uncaring mistress, this character is evidently deeply concerned about his wife's state of ill-health. As his appearance suggests, he has not left her side for many hours, preferring instead to remain steadfastly committed to alleviating her suffering with uncompromising devotion and sympathy. Further reinforcing the work's complex formal and thematic relation with its pair, the three maidservants who attend to the ailing female protagonist do so with conspicuous care and attention. Whilst one of these figures can be seen delicately arranging a cushion

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<sup>231</sup> I am grateful to Aileen Ribeiro and Susan Wheeler for identifying this figure's costume as the ordinary domestic dress (consisting of a dressing gown, cap and slippers) worn by middle- and upper-class men at home, and for therefore confirming the likely identity of this character as the protagonist's husband.

behind her mistress' back, the other two characters are similarly absorbed in their domestic duties.

By focusing his first work on the figure of an aging and decrepit male profligate, Penny can be seen to have portrayed a character whose cultural persona was closely aligned with narratives of social dissipation and moral decay. Indeed, as the entry to Edward Phillips's *New World of Words; Or, Universal English Dictionary* for 1706 makes clear, the term 'profligate' was understood to denote an individual who was 'wicked, villainous, debauched, or lewd to the highest degree'.<sup>232</sup> This figure, in other words, was someone who routinely partook in entertainments which were deemed to be morally subversive and impious. In this sense, Penny's image presented the view of a protagonist who closely paralleled one of the most instantly recognisable stock characters of contemporary art and literature, the famously uproarious libertine or 'rake'. Commonly invoked as the butt of comic and satiric criticism, the rake was known as the archetypal representative of extravagance and excess.<sup>233</sup> If we turn to Richard Ames's highly popular *The Rake; Or the Libertine's Religion* from 1693, we find an image of the rake from the period in which the identity of this stock figure was first fully defined.<sup>234</sup> Ames's miscreant male protagonist, in typically rakish fashion, spends his day getting inordinately drunk with friends, picking up loose women at a local playhouse and instigating violent and unlawful 'frolicks' around the city. We learn of this character's fondness for sitting with his companions around a 'mighty Punch-Bowl, Broad and Deep' and imbibing its contents 'Till we have lost the very Power to think', and of his proclivity for committing acts which '...all Mankind/ When they have heard the Deed, may wond'ring say/ What Men in Devil's shapes this thing have wrought?'.<sup>235</sup> Moreover, even whilst the young anti-hero boasts of his love for women, claiming that 'There was never a Woman known...But had a charm or two for me', he freely

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<sup>232</sup> Edward Phillips, *The New World of Words; Or, Universal English Dictionary* (London, 1706), p. 530.

<sup>233</sup> For more on contemporary perceptions of this figure, see Mark Hallett, 'Manly Satire: William Hogarth's *A Rake's Progress*', in Bernadette Fort and Angela Rosenthal (eds), *The Other Hogarth: Aesthetics of Difference* (Princeton and Oxford, 2001), pp. 142-61.

<sup>234</sup> For a general account of literary representations of deviant masculinity in eighteenth-century Britain, see David Foxon, *Libertine Literature in England, 1660-1745* (New York, 1965).

<sup>235</sup> Richard Ames, *The Rake; Or, The Libertine's Religion* (London, 1693), pp. 6, 8.

admits that marriage is a ‘cursed Noose...Fit only for the Plodding sot’.<sup>236</sup> Rather, this character professes to ‘Revel in my dear Belov’d Variety’.<sup>237</sup>

Outlining a pattern of disorderly behaviour that appears to have been considered typical of the rake throughout this period, these lines offer a suggestive parallel to Penny’s portrayal of the profligate. Given the profligate’s decidedly dishevelled and unhealthy appearance, we too are made to imagine that this figure, following in the footsteps of Ames’s habitually frivolous protagonist, has over-indulged in a number of similarly debauched and dissolute activities. Aside from being cast as a corpulent and sallow-skinned figure, suggesting that his pleasure-seeking exploits have reached chronic proportions, Penny’s character is shown to be suffering from gout. Significantly, this age-old ailment, widely recognised to afflict the joints of the extremities, especially the big toe, was closely linked to excessive drinking as well as to licentious modes of living in general.<sup>238</sup> Indeed, as Thomas Sydenham’s influential *Treatise on the Gout* from 1683 makes clear,

The gout generally attacks those aged persons who have spent most part of their lives in ease, voluptuousness, high living, and too free an use of wine and other spirituous liquors, and at length, by reason of the common inability to motion in old age, entirely left off those exercises which young persons’ commonly use.<sup>239</sup>

The profligate’s gouty disorder, we can therefore suggest, functions as a clear and culturally resonant marker of his dissolute conduct.

Yet, it is precisely the idea that Penny’s character is cast as a ‘profligate’ and is made to appear as an jaded and ailing gout victim that, on another level, endows this figure with greater symbolic import than that conventionally associated with the rake. Even as Ames’s character represents a highly deviant form of masculinity, he is cast as a young male student who – as in most contemporary portrayals of the rake – soon puts a stop to his debauched existence by acknowledging his mistakes and reforming his ways. Realising that if he persists in this pattern of behaviour his old age will be

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<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 13.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>238</sup> For more on the history of gout and its cultural associations, see Roy Porter and George S. Rousseau, *Gout: The Patrician Malady* (New Haven and London, 1998), esp. pp. 48-92.

<sup>239</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 43.

afflicted by ‘the Palsie, Stone or Gout’, he undergoes ‘some true pangs of conversion’ and remorsefully ‘[builds] new Altars to a fairer Divinity’.<sup>240</sup>

The ageing profligate, by contrast, must clearly have persisted in his dissolute ways for he is shown as having fallen victim to the disease most feared by Ames’s rake—gout. Far from being ready to reform, then, Penny’s ailing character stands as an individual whose habitual intemperance has trapped him in a state of irremediable extremity. This impression, moreover, is strongly reinforced by the striking correspondences between Penny’s portrayal and contemporary medical descriptions of the disease’s symptoms. For instance, as Nicholas Robinson’s *Essay on the Gout* of 1755 explains,

...once the gouty Cause has seized upon the noble Principles of Life, impaired the free passages to the Brain, and destroyed those fine nervous Fibres, upon whose delicate Tone, and due Modulation, the most exquisite Sensations have their chief Dependence; then the whole animal Nature begins to flag; then the joyous, chearful [*sic*], and exhilarating Ideas are totally shut out from the Mind; then nothing but gloomy Thoughts, melancholy Reflections, and black Despair disturb his Peace in the Day-time; horrible Dreams, frightful Visions, and ghastly Fantasies, perplex his Soul during the distasteful Period of a loathsome Night.<sup>241</sup>

According to Robinson, as the gouty individual becomes more hardened, he consequently becomes less capable of experiencing refined feeling. Beset by a terrifying cocktail of symptoms which systematically destroy the ‘nervous Fibres’, this individual loses his capacity to feel ‘exquisite Sensations’, being afflicted instead by ‘black despair’ and ‘frightful Visions’.<sup>242</sup> The gout sufferer, therefore, must not only endure physical pain but also an irreparable blunting and darkening of his emotions. Deprived of the responsiveness and sensitivity so highly prized as the foundations of sociability and virtuous conduct, this figure is taken out of the bounds of sensibility. In the same way, Penny’s character, tormented by the very nerve-damaging afflictions described by Robinson, is not only physically impaired but is

<sup>240</sup> Ames, *The Rake*, pp. 1, 3 and the Preface, not paginated.

<sup>241</sup> Nicholas Robinson, *An Essay on the Gout, and All Gouty Affections Incident to Affect Mankind* (London, 1755), p. 177.

<sup>242</sup> For the full quotation from which these terms are drawn, see *ibid.*, p. 176.

reduced to a state of crass and helpless desperation. Chair-bound and enfeebled, he rages in vain against an illness for which the only source of relief – a small medicine bottle on the table beside him – appears hopelessly inadequate. We can even see from the profligate's oddly suggested, emasculated genitalia that his long-continued debauches have compromised his manliness and virility to the degree that he has been rendered completely impotent.

Pictured with clenched fists and bared teeth, moreover, Penny's profligate forms a striking counterpart to Hogarth's famously unprincipled but tragic protagonist Tom Rakewell in the sixth plate of *The Rake's Progress* (fig. 62) from 1735. Having, as this image shows, just lost his fortune for a second time, Tom, utterly distraught at his ill-luck, has flung himself to his knees and is violently venting his anger with little concern for those around him or for his personal honour. Not only does Hogarth's engraving show this character to have reached, through his ceaselessly rakish exploits, a state of extreme depravity but also, as a result, one of near-madness and despair. Wigless and forlorn, Tom is depicted both shaking his clenched fists in the air and, in a gesture echoing that of the dog's hideous scowl to his left, baring his teeth in an agonised grimace. As his contemptuous heavenward glare also suggests, Tom has wilfully placed himself in direct opposition to God and religion and, like Penny's profligate, appears beyond redemption. In line with Hogarth's protagonist, then, Penny's character can be seen to represent an alternative conception of the rake. Despite many opportunities for reprieve, Penny's profligate – like the unrepentant Tom Rakewell – proves incorrigibly and self-destructively attached to his debauched lifestyle. The profligate, in other words, is the rake that has stubbornly persevered with his immoral and scandalous lifestyle.

In making use of such a desperate and irredeemable figure, Penny, we can suggest, was seeking to promote a moral narrative that was self-consciously serious in tone. This is confirmed by the strikingly frequent occurrence of a closely comparable model of male profligacy and its associated effects in contemporary sermon literature.<sup>243</sup> In this body of texts, the profligate is presented as someone who,

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<sup>243</sup> On the centrality of the sermon in eighteenth-century English culture, see James J. Caudle, 'Measures of Allegiance: Sermon Culture and the Creation of a Public Discourse of Obedience and Resistance in Georgian Britain, 1714-1760' (unpublished PhD thesis, Yale University, 1996). For wider ranging accounts of the early modern sermon in both a British and European context, see also Rolf P. Lessenich, *Elements of Pulpit Oratory in Eighteenth-Century England, 1660-1800* (Cologne

through progressive habituation to intemperate indulgences, has become wholly indifferent to moral and religious duty. For instance, in a sermon written by the celebrated seventeenth-century divine John Tillotson and republished throughout the eighteenth century, we are told that

...men that allow themselves in any lewd or intemperate course, will find it very hard to govern themselves in it; for after men have forfeited their innocence, and broke in upon their natural modesty, they are apt by degrees to grow profligate and desperate.<sup>244</sup>

The same ideas also appear to have been at play in John Holland's *The Folly and Guilt of Intemperance* from 1750. Again, Holland is keen to point out that

If you boldly venture to the utmost limits of temperance, if you regard place, time and company, as things indifferent, if you begin to dally with vice, and walk heedless among its snares, your wise friends will tremble with the apprehension, that you will one day become an abandoned profligate...all habits are formed by degrees. After the first offence, the second excuse will serve for a second, and be more easily admitted; for the restraints both of honour and conscience will be weakened.<sup>245</sup>

It is in William Dodd's celebrated *Sermons to Young Men* from 1772, however, that we find the most forceful critique of the profligate's ever-increasing contempt for the restraints of honour and conscience. Building on the ideas of his earlier colleagues, Dodd presents a damning description of so-called 'Men of Pleasure' that powerfully exposes the callous insensitivity of

...those Miserable profligates, who are in every respect as undeserving of the name, as they are ignorant of the nature of true pleasure. Men, who unrestrained by principle, uncontrolled by law human or divine, make no scruple of breaking through the most sacred ties, the most solemn obligations; hesitate not to wound with the keenest anguish, and to injure in the most irreparable manner, so they

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and Vienna, 1972); W. F. Mitchell, *English Pulpit Oratory from Andrewes to Tillotson: A Study of its Literary Aspects* (New York, 1962); and Joris van Eijnatten (ed.), *Preaching, Sermon and Cultural Change in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Leiden and Boston, 2009).

<sup>244</sup> John Tillotson, *Sermons on Several Subjects and Occasions, By the most Reverend Dr John Tillotson, Late Lord Archbishop of Canterbury* (12 vols) (London, 1742), vol. 9, p. 3858.

<sup>245</sup> John Holland, *The Folly and Guilt of Intemperance* (London, 1750), pp. 72-73.

can but gratify those foul lusts and impure desires, which they dignify with the name of Pleasures.<sup>246</sup>

Taken to its extreme, then, the profligate's pattern of dissolute and intemperate behaviour is seen by all three clergymen to result in a total lack of social conscience and a complete abandonment of moral principles. In this sense, the term profligate can be seen not only as a marker of extremity but as having specifically religious implications.

The close parallels between Penny's portrayal of the profligate and these texts strongly suggest that the artist's imagery was rooted not only in established secular stereotypes of the rake but in the didactic and moralising concerns of contemporary religious discourse. That prevailing religious and moral teachings had, by 1774, become a central part of Penny's exhibition practice is confirmed with even greater force by the artist's treatment of his second protagonist. In this piece, the central figure, cast as a middle-aged woman, is shown wearing a simple white dress and over-jacket which decorously cover her whole body to leave no flesh on display. Albeit stylish and expensive-looking, this character's clothes avoid ostentation. Thus, we are given the impression that Penny's protagonist, taking great pride in appearing spotless and orderly, has more concern for the values of propriety and neatness than for fashion—an idea that is further underscored by her snug-fitting linen cap, an article of clothing that not only ensures that her hair is kept in place but also modestly conceals it from view.

The uncommon modesty and rectitude which this figure displays, moreover, is also suggested by her relaxed though eminently upright pose. With her legs and feet placed neatly together and her back elegantly elongated in her chair, Penny's character stands as the epitome of dignified and respectable womanhood. Indeed, there appears to be no room for idleness or negligence in her household. This figure may be pictured as a frail convalescent but the composed confidence of her hand gesture – she is pictured motioning in an assured manner towards her husband – implies that she nevertheless possesses considerable authority. Assuming an almost regal air, Penny's protagonist appears to fulfil her duty as both wife and homemaker with consummate skill. Clearly, it is thanks to her competence and efficiency as

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<sup>246</sup> William Dodd, *Sermons to Young Men* (London, 1772), p. 142.

mistress of the house that her employees are able to undertake their chores with such proficiency and dedication.

Further adding to this image of female efficiency and industriousness, Penny's protagonist is portrayed with a workbasket by her side. Apparently brimming with an array of intricately sewn linens, this important narrative detail not only suggests that the artist's character has been engaged in such archetypally feminine pursuits as embroidery and decorative needlework but that she also assumes the essential housewifely role of keeper of the linen. Purchasing and maintaining household linens was an activity that fell to most wives in the period and, as the cleanliness of her dress and the other carefully-tended textiles around her testify, Penny's protagonist is a fastidious administrator of the linen cupboard.<sup>247</sup> Yet, for all the resourcefulness and agency this figure clearly displays, she also embodies great tenderness. It is only with the gentlest of touches, for instance, that she clasps the handkerchief to her right side whilst gesturing towards her husband with the other hand. Moreover, we are given a clear sense of this character's exceptional sensitivity and warmth by her striking delicacy and open-handedness of demeanour. Despite her illness, Penny's protagonist does not react to those around her with anger and aggression. Rather, the manner in which she generously extends an open hand to her husband confirms that she feels deep affection and concern for him. We even find that, inclining her head towards this other figure whilst gently avoiding his gaze, the artist's character is keen to show respect for and thus support her husband's paternal authority.

In all these respects, Penny's protagonist conforms closely to the ideals of virtuous womanhood and wifeliness which pervaded contemporary culture but which were particularly prominent in conduct manuals and published sermons. Indeed, scanning the pages of such popular conduct books as *The Lady's Companion* from 1743, we find a host of passages that privilege the same kinds of characteristics as those evoked by the artist's figure. As well as suggesting that 'a Wife in her Cloaths should avoid being too gaudy and not value herself upon an embroider'd Gown', this

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<sup>247</sup> For linen as one of the principal responsibilities of housewives in the eighteenth century, see Amanda Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England* (New Haven and London, 2009), pp. 120-22.

publication also stresses the importance of modesty as a marker of true female virtue.<sup>248</sup> As we are told,

Modesty...being a Guider and Regulator of all decent and comely Carriage and Behaviour...checks and confronts all rude Exorbitances, and is the great civilizer of conversations. It is indeed a Virtue of a general Influence, does not only ballast the Mind with sober and humble Thoughts of ourselves, but also steers away every Part of the outward Frame. It appears in the Face in calm and meek Looks, where it so impresses itself, that it gives the greatest lustre to a Feminine Beauty.<sup>249</sup>

According to the text, moreover, this trait is ‘not only confined to the Face...but is in Life and Motion in the Words’ of those females who amply embody it.<sup>250</sup> Modesty, we are therefore also told, banishes

all Indecency and Rudeness, all insolent Vauntings, and supercilious Disdains, and whatever else may render a Person troublesome, or ridiculous to company. It refines and tones the Language, modulates the Tones and Accents, not admitting the Intrusion of unhandsome, earnest, or loud Discourse; so that the Modest Tongue is like the imaginable Musick of the spheres, sweet and charming...<sup>251</sup>

Claiming that modesty manifests itself in every aspect of a woman’s conduct and demeanour, this manual, in other words, prescribes the very qualities that Penny’s restrained but beneficent figure so vividly brings to mind.

Another feature of the archetypal virtuous female that is addressed in *The Lady’s Companion* is that of efficiency. Regarding this trait as essential in the effective governance of a household, the conduct manual is keen to point out that any good wife should closely involve herself in the care and management of servants. As the publication reminds readers, servants ‘are the Wheels of a Family’ and ‘if these Engines stop or move wrong, the whole Order of [the] House is either at a Stand, or discomposed’.<sup>252</sup> It is therefore crucial that the mistress of the house should not ‘fall

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<sup>248</sup> Anon., *The Lady’s Companion: Or, An Infallible Guide to the Fair Sex* (2 vols) (London, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., 1743), vol. 1, p. 72.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

into the Mistake of thinking, that because they receive Wages, and are so much inferior to her...they are below her Care to know how to manage them'.<sup>253</sup> At the same time, however, it is imperative that an efficient wife should act with kindness and affability towards her employees. As this text also makes clear,

The Inequality that is between [a wife] and [her servants] must not make her forget, that Nature makes no such Distinction, but that servants may be looked upon as humble Friends, and that Returns of Kindness, and good Usage, are as much due to such of them as deserve it, as their Service is due to us when we require it.<sup>254</sup>

These same skills are also promoted as indispensable requisites of good housewifery in James Fordyce's celebrated *Sermons to Young Women* from 1766. In particular, Fordyce singles out thrift and industry as the key attributes of exemplary womanhood and provides a comprehensive list of desirable 'Domestic Accomplishments':

The learning to write a fair hand, and to cast accounts with facility; the looking into the dispositions and practices of servants; the informing yourselves about the prices of everything needful for a family, together with the best methods, and properest seasons, for providing it; the observing whatever relates to cleanliness and neatness in the furniture and apartments of a house; the understanding how to deal with domestics, tradesmen, and others; above all, the obtaining every possible light with relation to the nursing, management, and education of children...<sup>255</sup>

To Fordyce, however, no 'charm of understanding, or of person [can] compensate [for] the want of soft compliance and meek submission' in a wife.<sup>256</sup> Not only does he condemn the 'disputatious, perverse and stubborn female' as causing offense, but he criticises as 'mean' and 'miserable' the desire amongst some wives to treat their husbands as 'dastardly slaves' rather than seeking to 'influence those husbands as

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<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>255</sup> James Fordyce, *Sermons to Young Women* (2 vols) (London, 1766), vol. 1, pp. 232-33.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247.

tender friends'.<sup>257</sup> Once again, this combination of domestic assiduity and compliant respectfulness find concrete expression in Penny's second protagonist.

By embodying the traditional behavioural traits and domestic skills associated with the figure of the 'good wife', Penny's protagonist can be seen to evoke an even more explicitly religious archetype—that of the virtuous female character found in the Old Testament's Book of Proverbs.<sup>258</sup> Again, this exemplary figure, calling to mind Penny's character, is described as a supportive force who lends strength and purpose to her husband's external endeavours. As the passage states, 'The Heart of her Husband doth safely trust in her' and 'She will do [her husband] Good, and not Evil, all the Days of her Life'.<sup>259</sup> Moreover, we learn that this character possesses great sagacity and tenderness for 'She openeth her Mouth with Wisdom, and in her Tongue is the Law of Kindness'.<sup>260</sup> Finally, she is said to be endowed with the key domestic attributes of industry and frugality. We are not only told that 'She maketh fine Linnen' but that 'She looketh well to the ways of her Houshold, and eateth not the Bread of Idleness'.<sup>261</sup> It even appears that, being described as making 'Strength and Honour...her cloathing', this figure embodies the same degree of competence and dignity as Penny's protagonist.<sup>262</sup>

Thus, Penny's figure of the virtuous housewife draws on and develops a series of deeply entrenched social and religious ideals – those of meekness, modesty, thrift, and good management – that form a powerful contrast with the character of the profligate. Characterised by such traits as anger, coarseness, disarray and incompetence, the profligate stands as the virtuous female's very opposite. Just as she is pictured as the representative of a supreme state of womanhood, he becomes the representative of a profoundly flawed form of masculinity.

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<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>258</sup> The description of the virtuous woman from Proverbs was clearly held in high esteem throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as it not only formed the basis of numerous poems written in the period, including Sir Robert Filmer's unpublished 'In Praise of the Virtuous Wife' from the 1640s, but was also reproduced in no. 168 of Addison's and Steele's widely disseminated *Guardian* from 1714, reprinted in John C. Stephens (ed.), *The Guardian* (Lexington, 1982), pp. 546-47. For more on the literary tradition which sprung out of the 'Good Wife' paradigm, see Margaret J. M. Ezell, *The Patriarch's Wife: Literary Evidence and the History of the Family* (Chapel Hill, 1987), esp. pp. 36-61.

<sup>259</sup> Proverbs, 31:11-12.

<sup>260</sup> Proverbs, 31:26.

<sup>261</sup> Proverbs, 31:24-27.

<sup>262</sup> Proverbs, 31:25.

The opposition between these characters and the two worlds they occupy, moreover, is heightened by the differing attitudes they hold to illness. Befitting her status as a serene and composed wife, Penny's virtuous female bears her affliction with goodwill and patience. Fully retaining her dignity, this character shows no trace of self-pity or apprehension at her situation. Rather, she seems more concerned to alleviate the anxieties of those around her by offering her reassurance to them in the form of an open hand. In this sense, Penny's protagonist echoes the sentiments of John Kettlewell in his *Death Made Comfortable* from 1702. As Kettlewell suggested, all godly individuals should 'bear [their] Pains and Weakness with Gravity and Composedness, keeping back from all passionate, and from all light and vain Words'.<sup>263</sup> Given the thankful and accepting manner in which she is portrayed, Penny's virtuous female can be seen to confront her illness with the piety and godliness advocated by Kettlewell. The profligate, however, shows little concern for such behavioural codes. Boldly contradicting Kettlewell's words, he exhibits an openly resentful response to his illness. Not only does he rail against his disease in a most obdurate manner but he appears to place the blame for his condition on the negligence of the figures who attend him.

Further adding to the potency of the contrast between these figures, we also find that their differing moral attitudes are mirrored by their differing households. Whereas Penny's virtuous female is seen to preside over a household that is both stable and well-functioning, the profligate occupies the head of a household that is disordered and defective. In the former image, the maidservants, following the example of their mistress, are plainly though immaculately dressed. As well as being attired in clean and orderly dresses, the two principal maids are shown to be wearing impeccably starched bonnets. Clearly embodying the values of their virtuous employer, these figures also pursue their work with striking meticulousness and care. Whilst the two maids to the far left and centre tend to the rich hangings of the bed and to the chair in which the virtuous female sits, the figure to their right – who is most probably the protagonist's eldest daughter – prepares a bowl of broth for her convalescent mother to eat. As we are made to note, each female character displays the same lightness and delicacy of touch as that exhibited by their mistress. For instance, the maid who is shown arranging the cushion behind the virtuous female's back does so with the

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<sup>263</sup> John Kettlewell, *Death Made Comfortable: Or, the Way to Die Well* (London, 1702), p. 35.

gentlest pressure applied by fingertips only. Similarly, the youngest female's elegantly cocked finger suggests that she too carries out her duties with considered grace. All three women, in other words, assume a central role within the virtuous female's household. Thanks to the patience with which they undertake their tasks, this familial setting remains ordered and harmonious.

The second image, by contrast, presents a wholly antithetical view. In this picture, the unified bond between husband and wife is broken. There is no beneficent and caring wife to relieve the profligate's suffering and to take charge of his household. Rather, it is the profligate himself who occupies the centre of the family group while his extravagantly dressed mistress, shown indifferently turning her back on him to greedily drain the last drops of some alcoholic beverage, is pushed to its margins. With no authoritative wifely presence, moreover, the profligate's servants show more interest in each other than in their assigned domestic duties. The buxom maid, whose attire is messy and indecorously revealing by contemporary standards, is pictured eliciting the attentions of the footman who, standing suggestively beside her, clasps her wrist between his fingers. Shooting him a coy glance to reciprocate his flirtatious advances, she allows herself to be diverted from the task in hand and, as a result, heedlessly pours boiling water onto the profligate's diseased leg. Unlike their more diligent and industrious counterparts in the virtuous household, therefore, these figures represent the subversion of discipline and order.

Such disorder and disarray is further symbolised by the state of the profligate's tea-table. As a powerful emblem of gentility and refined sociability, the tea-table was seen to epitomise ideals of social harmony and familial cohesion.<sup>264</sup> This is clearly seen in William Hogarth's *The Strode Family* (fig. 63) from c.1738. Here, a genteel family group, comprising a newly married couple together with another member of their family and a friend, are shown partaking in the polite rituals of tea-drinking and conversation. Taking their places around an elegantly laid tea-table, these figures form an affable and intimate circle that, characterised by a polished and restrained sociability that even extends to the manservant who waits on them, vividly underscores the amity they enjoy as a household.

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<sup>264</sup> For a stimulating discussion of the tea-table as a symbol of civility and social stability, albeit in a colonial context, see Ann Smart Martin, 'Tea Tables Overturned: Rituals of Power and Place in Colonial America', in Dena Goodman & Kathryn Norbey (eds), *Furnishing the Eighteenth Century* (London, 2006), pp. 169-82.

The profligate's tea-table, by contrast, affords no such pleasures. Not only has its usual 'polite' function been debased by the maid's careless action and the placement of the profligate's dubious-looking medicine bottle in full view of the tea-making equipment but it has also become the site of delinquent activity. Carefully observing the maid's inattentiveness, the small boy to the left, presumably the profligate's illegitimate son, is shown reaching over the edge of the table to steal an abandoned purse of money. Just like the starving dog that greedily snatches the meat from the table in the final plate of Hogarth's *Marriage A-la-Mode* (fig. 64) from 1735, this character takes advantage of the chaos around him to impudently pocket his prize.

Pitting vice and indiscipline against virtue and order, Penny's two works hinge on the sharp polarity between two archetypal but opposing narratives. Taken together, these images embody a clear moral lesson. Those individuals who adhere to the values of religion and virtue will find comfort and sympathy even in the face of adversity. Those who stray from this path to pursue a debauched and corrupted life, however, will reap the consequences not just in physical suffering but in the indifference and contempt of others. Penny's *The Profligate Punished* and *The Virtuous Comforted*, then, do not simply present two contrasted images with opposing storylines but rather two emphatically moralistic and religious productions which deploy a potent pictorial contrast for specifically didactic purposes. Indeed, these images can be seen to represent sermons in paint.

In this respect, Penny can be seen to have drawn upon the example of works such as Francis Hayman's *The Bad Man at the Hour of Death* and *The Good Man at the Hour of Death* (figs 65 & 66). Produced in the late 1740s to hang in the garden of Jonathan Tyers's country estate in Dorking, Surrey, these also pitted a high-principled and exemplary figure against a corrupt and erring one.<sup>265</sup> Whilst the first image showed a dissolute but terror-stricken unbeliever at the point of being struck by Death's dart, the second work pictured a virtuous and godly Christian peacefully accepting his fate from a scythe-wielding figure representing Time. Hayman's images, anticipating Penny's later works, also featured subjects that were incapacitated through illness. Whereas the artist's 'good' figure was shown lying

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<sup>265</sup> Tyers's garden at the Denbies estate is discussed in detail in Brian Allen, 'Jonathan Tyers's Other Garden', *Journal of Garden History*, vol. 1, no. 3 (1981): 215-38. See also Allen, *Francis Hayman*, p. 142.

inertly in a curtained bed, his ‘bad’ profligate, being pictured with a crutch and gout stool by his foot, was cast – in line with Penny’s character – as an archetypal gout victim.

Interestingly, it appears that Hayman’s moralistic pairing was not the only production from this period to make use of such an explicit contrast between sinfulness and virtue. Moving forward by two decades, we find that a poetical essay by the dissenting minister Daniel Turner offered a similarly strident moral narrative that vividly underscored the consequences of following two divergent moral courses. Published in 1768 and suggestively entitled *The Contrast; or the Dying Profligate and the Dying Christian in Two Poetical Essays*, Turner’s work not only revolved around the comparable figures of a dissolute profligate and a pious Christian but, in the same way as Hayman’s pair of images, dramatized these characters’ correspondingly agonised and tranquil ends. As Turner boldly claimed, ‘...there is scarcely any thing in nature more evident, than that vice and misery are so inseparably connected, that the latter, first or last must be the consequence of the former’.<sup>266</sup> For the virtuous male subject whose life was ‘full of divine hope and joy’, however, Turner described a mode of death that was both ‘happy and triumphant’.<sup>267</sup> Like both Hayman’s and Penny’s paintings, then, Turner’s poem provided an ardently religious and didactic production that, by means of the dramatically divergent fates of its pious and profligate exemplars, brought the link between sinfulness and suffering and virtue and happiness into stark relief.

Whilst Penny’s images were clearly intended to build upon and develop the models presented by Hayman’s and Turner’s productions, they departed from these works’ exclusive focus on a male protagonist by introducing a crucial female element. Rather than setting the profligate against an equivalent virtuous male, Penny can be seen to have given a striking – and innovative – prominence to the virtuous housewife, who is opposed to the profligate not only in conduct but also in gender. The result is that while vice is, in effect, represented as stereotypically male, virtue is shown to be gendered as female.

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<sup>266</sup> Daniel Turner, *The Contrast; Or, the Dying Profligate, and the Dying Christian, in Two Poetical Essays* (London, 1768), p. 5.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

In making this move, Penny can be seen to have aligned his paintings with an even more recent and relevant precedent, that of Carrington Bowles's self-consciously attractive and accessible graphic pairing *The Batchelor's Curse* and *Conjugal Happiness* (figs 67 & 68) from 1769. Like Penny's two works, these images also present scenes which hinge on opposing familial prospects and which incorporate a female protagonist. The first image, befitting its playful but deeply sceptical title, offers the view of a sparsely furnished bed-chamber peopled by the ill-assorted figures of a gouty bachelor and his overweight doctor, together with a pregnant girl and her middle-aged female companion. Judging by the displeased expression and indignantly raised hand of the older woman, presumably the girl's mother, the gout-ridden protagonist is being upbraided for having seduced and impregnated her young daughter. Whilst the woman is shown pointing an accusatory finger at her interlocutor and gesturing towards the girl's stomach with her other hand, the ailing bachelor is pictured staring helplessly back at his erstwhile conquest. In the background, meanwhile, we see an over-curious maidservant peering suspiciously from behind a bed and an aggressive-looking bailiff approaching to seize the bachelor's goods. Thanks to his single state, the bachelor – in a similar way to Penny's profligate – faces illness, bankruptcy, scandal and disgrace. Indeed, as the lines which accompany the image aptly lament, 'The Batchelor Monopolizes Ills', for he not only suffers from gout but must also endure 'Quacks, Bailiffs, Bastards, Boluses, and Pills'.

The second image, by contrast, portrays a contented and harmonious family. Here, an unostentatious though comfortably-furnished parlour houses a well-dressed and respectable couple together with their three young children. The male protagonist and his wife, cast as the heads of a caring and supportive household, are shown seated on a plain but elegant sofa with their smallest child beside them. In line with Penny's virtuous husband and wife, these figures act with genuine warmth and affection towards one another. Just as the female figure, displaying her wifely devotion, is shown looking up at her husband and gently resting a hand on his leg, the male protagonist, reciprocating his wife's attentions, is pictured placing one arm around this character's shoulders whilst gesturing towards his children with the other. Not only is the man's benevolent gesture sympathetically mirrored by his smallest child, moreover, but we also find that, in exemplary fashion, his other two

children exhibit a similar degree of concern and affection for one another. Engaged in the morally-instructive activity of learning to read, the protagonist's eldest daughter is portrayed holding a book for her brother while he recites a passage to her. As we see from their shared absorption and evident delight in pursuing this task, they, like their parents, enjoy a close and mutually-sustaining familial relationship. Thus, bound together by their tender gestures and expressions, all the figures within this image form a cohesive family group that, as the accompanying lines of verse highlight, amply embodies the 'United Sensibility of Love'.

Setting a debased and dysfunctional 'anti-family' against an ideal companionate household, these images, like Penny's two works, offer contrasting moral storylines that strikingly foreground contemporary models of exemplary and deviant gender relations.<sup>268</sup> Because the gouty bachelor seeks to exploit the young girl he has just seduced and, as such, misuses her femininity, his household is deprived of the comfort and pleasure that could only be bestowed upon it by a virtuous female presence. On the other hand, the contented husband wholeheartedly embraces the civilising influence of his wife's femininity and consequently enjoys a supportive and fulfilling family life. The state of each respective household, then, is determined by the nature of the relationship that exists between the male protagonist and his female counterpart. Within each of these images, the female figure assumes a pivotal role that rivals that of the principal male character pictured.

But even as these two sets of works can be seen to privilege the feminine, Penny's pairing arguably marks a shift from Carrington Bowles's earlier example. As we have seen, the latter images hinge on a roughly equivalent relation between, on the one hand, the gouty bachelor and the pregnant girl and, on the other hand, the contented husband and his tender-spirited wife. In Penny's paintings, however, the contrast between the sexes is made more emphatic by the explicit opposition that is established between the corrupt male figure who assumes the central role in the first scene and the virtuous female character who assumes the principal role in its pendant. Thus, for the first time, we are presented with a female figure whose situation becomes the unequivocal focus of the narrative being dramatized.

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<sup>268</sup> The classic statement of the companionate family as a mutually-supportive partnership of complementary equals is to be found in Lawrence Stone's pioneering *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (1977; London, 1990), pp. 217-53.

For what reason, then, did Penny focus his images on such a strongly gendered contrast? What made his virtuous female character seem such a fitting counterpart to the figure of the corrupt profligate? The primary answer almost certainly lies in Penny's desire to capitalise on the increasingly widespread perception that women experienced sensation and emotion in an especially acute and overt way. Indeed, as Janet Todd notes, 'the female body became an organism peculiarly susceptible to influence', making women 'express emotions with their bodies more sincerely and spontaneously than men'.<sup>269</sup> Significantly, this special sensitivity was thought to have moral implications. As Graham Barker-Benfield has shown, the acute sensibility thought characteristic of females was believed to enhance their capacity for virtuous conduct by enabling them to better identify with the suffering of others. By the same token, their sensibility also increased their own vulnerability to suffering. This, in its turn, was believed to attract the sympathetic engagement of males, who would be 'softened' and therefore become more capable of virtue as a result. Thus virtue, suffering, femininity and sympathetic engagement were deeply interrelated in eighteenth-century culture.<sup>270</sup>

In choosing to centre his second work on a female rather than another male protagonist, Penny, alongside enhancing the dramatic force of his exhibit, was clearly seeking to raise the affective impact of his submission. Far from presenting a neutral counterpoint to the ailing and jaded profligate, Penny's suffering female character functioned as a potent pictorial emblem carefully designed to maximise viewer engagement with the moral choice being presented. Indeed, we can even see the sympathetic male character shown standing to the right of this protagonist as a kind of surrogate spectator; a figure who – mirroring the response of the work's viewers themselves – shares in the emotions that bind the virtuous female and those around her into a harmonious moral whole. Placing the viewer at the very heart of their unfolding moral storyline, then, Penny's newest images take Carrington Bowles's model and develop its narrative potential to attain a striking level of actuality and immediacy.

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<sup>269</sup> Todd, *Sensibility*, p. 19.

<sup>270</sup> For a wide-ranging discussion of women, nerve theory and sensibility, see G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago and London, 1992), esp. ch. 1, pp. 1-36.

This, moreover, is not the only way in which Penny made use of Bowles's pairing to enhance the appeal of his images. Considering the latter's two prints in greater detail, it is clear that these works derived their effect by drawing together some of the most iconic and instantly recognisable characters from Hogarth's highly celebrated *oeuvre*, particularly those figures associated with the best-selling graphic productions *The Harlot's Progress* from 1732, *The Rake's Progress* from 1735 and *Marriage A-la-Mode* from 1745. Not only, for instance, do we find that the figure of the incapacitated bachelor clearly recalls Hogarth's gouty earl from the first plate of *Marriage A-la-Mode* (fig. 69) but that the figures of the pregnant girl and her angry mother are direct appropriations of the earlier artist's equivalent characters from the first plate of *The Rake's Progress* (fig. 70). Furthermore, Bowles's figure of the portly doctor, shown ineffectually taking his patient's pulse whilst gazing with bemusement at the fracas, can also be read as a self-conscious adaptation of Hogarth's corpulent and inattentive quack physician from the fifth plate of the first series (fig. 71).

By drawing so overtly on these well-known images, Bowles's prints were undoubtedly produced to capitalise on the beginnings of what Shelia O'Connell has described as the great boom in Hogarth collecting. Albeit focused around the latter decades of the century, this so-called 'Hogarthomania' can be seen to have originated several years earlier with the publication of such volumes as Horace Walpole's *Anecdotes of Painting in England* from 1762 and John Granger's *A Biographical History of England...Adapted to a Methodical Catalogue of Engraved British Heads* (1769-1774), which sparked an unprecedented interest in collecting native British art.<sup>271</sup> Yet, even as Bowles's images exploited this renewed taste for graphic satire to the full, they reworked Hogarth's example in an increasingly 'polite' and dignified vein. Rather than duplicating the unflinching willingness of the earlier artist to depict the most vulgar and disreputable scenes, these prints generated views which were cleansed of all coarse and threatening elements. The indignant mother's accusatory gesture, for instance, appears more calmly disapproving than openly angry. In the same way, the bachelor's dejected and enfeebled appearance makes him an almost comically unlikely villain. These changes, we can suggest,

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<sup>271</sup> See Sheila O'Connell, 'Hogarthomania and the Collecting of Hogarth', in David Bindman, *Hogarth and His Times: Serious Comedy* (Berkeley, 1997), pp. 58-60.

reflected Bowles's concern to adapt his exemplars to the taste of a broad and self-consciously respectable clientele. Moderating and taming Hogarth's biting humour, these images operated to promote the comfortable domestic ideals of the quintessential 'middling' consumer.<sup>272</sup> Indeed, this emerges not only in the handling of the characters but in the very settings they inhabit: elegant and affluent without being extravagant, these spaces conform precisely to the aspirations and experience of the modestly prosperous, commercial and professional families who formed Bowles's principal market.

These are all elements which Penny's images readily redeploy, albeit in a slightly different way and for slightly different purposes. Through presenting the viewer with the strikingly exaggerated figure of a desperate profligate, the artist's pairing also adopts the strategy of centralising a recognisably Hogarthian character. Like Bowles's ailing bachelor, Penny's protagonist also recalls the louche and gouty Earl from the first plate of *Marriage A-la-Mode* (fig. 69). Again, he is not only made to appear as a corpulent and inactive figure but he is pictured resting his diseased foot on the obligatory gout stool. Moreover, Penny's works employ closely comparable settings to those used within Bowles's images. As well as portraying two opposing domestic interiors, the artist's pictures contain many of the same basic features that occur in Bowles's pairing. Reinforcing their ordinary, everyday status, these spaces likewise make use of an array of suitably familiar household furnishings, including a bed, two side-tables and two chairs. At the same time, however, Penny's images seek to modify Bowles's example to provide a more fittingly elevated Academy production. This is apparent both in the finer quality of the protagonists' clothing and the greater refinement of their material possessions. Whereas Bowles's figures are plainly dressed and enjoy surroundings that are self-consciously unostentatious, Penny's figures wear stylish clothes and occupy spaces that, adorned with such costly decorative items as the richly-patterned carpet found in the virtuous female's household, are visibly smarter. Even the profligate, whose dishevelled appearance underscores his baseness, appears to be wearing a waistcoat that is trimmed with

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<sup>272</sup> A general description of the rise of the 'middling' consumer is given by Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783* (London, New York, Sydney and Toronto, 1989), pp. 68-71. For a more comprehensive account of the emergence of a new market for luxury goods amongst middle-class consumers, see Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2007).

gold braid. Every aspect of these images, in other words, reflects the standards of a more distinguished social milieu.

Clearly, Penny had recognised the wider commercial potential of Bowles's images and sought to retain this quality in his own two works even as he raised their subject matter to the level of Academic art. Taking the template offered by Hayman as his starting point, Penny can be seen to have developed this in line with Bowles's pair of images to create an exhibition submission that was both religiously and morally informed but also highly accessible and visually attractive. Indeed, it is by situating his images in such close proximity to Bowles's highly familiar graphic works that Penny was able to enhance their appeal and thus reproduce what amounted to elite painted productions as popular prints. Engraved by the leading mezzotint artist, Valentine Green, and published by Sayer and Bennett in 1775, these plates were elegant reworkings of Penny's original paintings for a broader middle-class market. At the same time, by using Bowles's images as an intermediary source, Penny was able to appropriate a quintessentially Hogarthian tradition of satirical imagery for the higher artistic purposes of the Academy. Thus, in a manner strikingly reminiscent of John Trusler's celebrated 1768 publication *Hogarth Moralized*, Penny succeeded in exploiting the cultural resonance of the earlier artist's idiom without making himself vulnerable to charges of vulgarity and coarseness.<sup>273</sup>

Penny can also be seen to have secured his works' respectability and worth in the exhibition arena in a number of further ways. By producing a pairing which set a debauched profligate against a virtuous wife, Penny was essentially creating an exhibit that could be understood as a 'modern' British equivalent to the genre paintings of such celebrated seventeenth-century Dutch masters as Jan Steen and Jacob Toorenvliet. Comparing Steen's *The Dissolute Household or the Effects of Intemperance* (fig. 72) from c.1660 and Toorenvliet's *A Surgeon Binding up a Woman's Arm* (fig. 73) from 1666 with Penny's pair of images, for instance, we find

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<sup>273</sup> Trusler was an Anglican clergyman and sought, in his lengthy 1768 commentary on Hogarth, to raise the artist's work above the stigmatised category of satire to that of serious moral art. As Trusler's title page reads, *Hogarth Moralized* was expressly geared to 'Pointing out the many Beauties that may have hitherto escaped Notice [and, as such, commenting] on their Moral Tendency [in order] to improve the Minds of Youth, and, convey Instruction, under the Mask of Entertainment'. An informative analysis of Trusler's text is provided by Ronald Paulson, 'The Harlot, her Father, and the Parson: Representing and Interpreting Hogarth in the Eighteenth Century', in Peter Wagner (ed.), *Icons, Texts, Iconotexts: Essays on Ekphrasis and Intermediality* (Berlin and New York, 1996), pp. 149-74.

many striking structural and formal correspondences between the two sets of works. In Steen's painting, we are presented with the view of a chaotic and dissipated household that strongly anticipates Penny's later portrayal of the profligate and his family. Like Penny's cast of characters, Steen's protagonists, albeit enjoying considerable wealth and status, have abandoned themselves to a wholly disreputable lifestyle. Not only is the floor of this family's home littered with the remains of a disorderly entertainment but the head of the household – in similar fashion to Penny's protagonist – is shown drunkenly slumped in his chair. Moreover, this figure's recumbent posture and inelegantly splayed legs almost exactly replicate those of the profligate. In fact, the resemblance between these two characters is so close that it seems unlikely to be coincidental, suggesting that Penny knew either this or a related image.

The similarities between Toorenvliet's image and Penny's work are even more remarkable. Closely foreshadowing Penny's portrayal of the virtuous household, Toorenvliet's picture also depicts a well-dressed young woman resting in an armchair within an elegant interior. As with Penny's protagonist, this female character also appears to be in a state of ill-health, for she is shown having her right arm bound by a young physician, presumably as a consequence of having undergone a course of bloodletting to relieve an ailment. What also makes this image an especially compelling counterpart to Penny's work is the way in which the two hardworking maidservants, positioned at either side of the canvas, are shown performing comparable domestic duties to those carried out by the equivalent figures in the later painting. Just as Penny's maids are shown arranging bed linen and ensuring the comfort of their virtuous employer, the younger servant in Toorenvliet's image is pictured folding laundry whilst her older companion, assuming an appropriately matronly air, is pictured attending to her mistress. With so many constituent elements in common, Penny's image – even as it replaces the figure of the attentive doctor with that of a sympathetic husband – clearly stands as a self-conscious evocation of this kind of Dutch imagery.

Penny's use of these precedents is highly revealing because even though, in theoretical terms, Dutch painting was regarded as inferior to Italian art, such works were nevertheless prized for their vivid naturalism and, from the 1760s onwards, came to acquire special aesthetic significance amongst collectors and connoisseurs.

As Harry Mount has shown, it is in this period that British buyers, responding to the dispersal of several great Continental collections as well as the activities of entrepreneurial dealers like John Greenwood and John Bertels, began collecting Dutch paintings in significant numbers.<sup>274</sup> Indeed, not only did ambitious artists like Joshua Reynolds develop wide-ranging reference collections of Dutch art but important and influential connoisseurs like the Third Earl of Bute and Sir Lawrence Dundas also amassed rich specialist collections focusing on particular Dutch painters.<sup>275</sup> Most notably, Dundas, whose acquisitions were famously discerning, owned fifteen pictures by the preeminent genre painter David Teniers.<sup>276</sup> No less significantly, John Boydell's highly prestigious publication *A Collection of Prints Engraved after the Most Capital Paintings in England* from 1769 and 1772 can be seen to have juxtaposed scenes by Dutch artists like Nicolaes Berchem and Adriaen van Ostade with works by the most renowned French and Italian masters.<sup>277</sup>

By drawing so overtly on the pictorial models offered by Dutch artists such as Steen and Toorenvliet, Penny was clearly seeking to capitalise on the growing fashion for Netherlandish art. Moreover, in aligning his work with these particular precedents, the artist was drawing on a form of imagery that was widely recognised as catering to 'high' connoisseurial tastes. Not only could the work of such artists as Steen and Toorenvliet be seen to offer an attractive alternative to the idealised productions of Italian painters but, as the collecting activities of men like Bute and Dundas testify, these minutely rendered pieces were admired for the distinctive qualities they were seen to possess. Indeed, Dutch art – and particularly that side of the school aligned with the higher-ranking productions of its most esteemed representatives – was valued for its strength of expression, its handling of light and colour, and its refinement of finish. Turning to Matthew Pilkington's best-selling *Gentleman and Connoisseur's Dictionary of Painting* from 1770, we find an abundance of descriptions of Dutch painters that privilege these precise characteristics. As well as singling out Dutch art for its 'extreme neatness' and 'exactness', Pilkington praises this strand of imagery for displaying 'peculiar and uncommon transparency', for

<sup>274</sup> Mount, 'The Reception of Dutch Genre Painting in England', p. 114.

<sup>275</sup> As Mount states, Reynolds bought Dutch genre paintings throughout his life. The Bute collection, which was visited by the German art historian Gustav Waagen in the 1830s, apparently contained over twenty genre pieces by a range of Dutch artists. See *ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>277</sup> Boydell's publication, the second volume of which was edited by Penny, is discussed in Timothy Clayton, *The English Print 1688-1802* (New Haven and London, 1997), pp. 177-80.

introducing ‘lights and shadows...with so much judgement that every figure seems animated’, and for achieving ‘the beauty of high finishing’.<sup>278</sup> To Pilkington, it is the capacity of Dutch painters to portray form and texture with ‘such truth and ease’ that makes their work ‘an entertainment to examine’.<sup>279</sup> With their fastidious brushwork and meticulous rendering of surface detail, Penny’s images clearly sought to recreate these painterly qualities. In the same way that the older pictures elicited a viewing experience that was both intimate and refined, the artist’s two works presented similarly small-scale and exquisite productions calculated to satisfy the most demanding connoisseurs.

Penny’s skilful deployment of Dutch precedents was not the only means by which he sought to reinforce the status of his images. It would also seem that the artist consciously infused his paintings with the gravity and symbolic intent of traditional allegorical imagery. As the carefully phrased titles of his images imply, Penny clearly intended his characters to be read as personifications of the particular moral concepts dramatized by his chosen subjects. In the title of the first image, the key qualities of virtue, sympathy and attentiveness are capitalised for emphasis and, in each case, we can readily equate the relevant quality with a particular figure or group of figures. Whilst the central figure of the benevolent wife serves as an undisputable representation of virtue, her concerned husband and the three women who attend her become potent emblems of sympathy and attentiveness respectively. Similarly, in the second image we are presented with a group of figures that unmistakably manifest the negative qualities that its title highlights. Again, just as the central figure of the gouty man stands as the epitome of profligacy, his heedless servants embody neglect whilst his indifferent mistress and larcenous son betoken contempt.

Penny’s images, in this respect, allude to higher allegories of sympathy and negligence and, as such, transcend what can be – and were – regarded as the delimiting qualities of genre painting—its reduced scale; its focus on ‘low’ status, anonymous protagonists; its anti-heroic and anecdotal character; its focus on detail and particularity rather than generality and abstraction; its tendency to veer towards

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<sup>278</sup> Matthew Pilkington, *Gentleman’s and Connoisseur’s Dictionary of Painting* (London, 1770), pp. 384, 435, 412. Significantly, Pilkington’s comments relate to both the ‘high-end’ genre scenes of Gabriel Metsu and the quintessentially ‘low’ subject paintings of Adriaen van Ostade.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 384.

the comic.<sup>280</sup> In this way, the artist's use of allegory appears to have enabled him to produce an increasingly generalised – and thus appropriately 'Academic' – mode of genre painting. Indeed, the figures depicted within these images, especially those portrayed in *The Virtuous Comforted*, evince a certain kind of monumentality and weightiness. With their differing gestures limited to a few restrained but deliberate movements, these characters maintain an air of calm composure. Moreover, this sense of equanimity and containment is further strengthened by the fact that we cannot see their full faces. Creating the impression that time and movement have been momentarily arrested, Penny's characters are portrayed in profile or with their backs turned towards the viewer. In spite of their astonishing detail, then, these paintings achieve a striking level of concision that lends them an almost classicising simplicity. Both allegorising daily life and grounding allegory in the everyday, Penny's images attain the gravity of a historical tableau without forsaking accessibility and immediacy.

With his newest pair of exhibition works, Penny was not only seeking to showcase his increased ambitions as an artist but also to assert the novelty and uniqueness of his developing practice. This is immediately apparent in the range of sources and models Penny drew upon and fused together to create his two images. Not only did the artist once again look to his predecessor Francis Hayman for an imagery that stressed moral contrast, but he extended his frame of reference to embrace Carrington Bowles's popular graphic example and the older and more prestigious Dutch genre tradition. Whilst Hayman's contrasted religious images enabled Penny to construct a pictorial narrative that presented an authoritative didactic message, Bowles's pair of prints provided him with the means to make that message attractive and appealing. Moreover, by drawing on Bowles's precedent, Penny was able to capitalise on the power of the companionate family as a social and sentimental ideal as well as on the pervasive familiarity of Hogarth's satirical imagery. At the same time, through his use of the famously accomplished Dutch idiom, the artist endowed his representations with a degree of detail and refinement that befitted the tastes of

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<sup>280</sup> These longstanding criticisms of genre painting are discussed at greater length in chapters 2 and 3 of Mount, 'The Reception of Dutch Genre Painting in England'. On the issue of minuteness and detail in particular, see Harry Mount, 'Morality, Microscopy and the Moderns: The Meaning of Minuteness in Shaftesbury's Theory of Painting', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 28, no. 2 (September 1998): 125-41.

the Academy's increasingly discerning audience. All of these elements were then subtly overlaid with allegorical and symbolic meaning to secure their aesthetic status. In sum, then, the key components of Penny's latest images were an exemplary moral narrative that deployed a straightforward pictorial contrast to encourage the pleasures of comparison; an accessible and affecting subject matter that engaged the viewer's sympathy; and a high level of painterly polish and finish. By combining these various strands in a compelling and cohesive way, Penny succeeded in pioneering a new form of genre painting that operated across the axis between particularity, detail and anecdote and something more abstract, generalised and allegorical. Transcending the conventional polarity between 'high' and 'low' forms of imagery, these works played to the interests of both the wider public and the cognoscenti and thus achieved a degree of universality unprecedented in the artist's career and unparalleled in the Academy arena.

## II

After the unprecedented success of his previous two exhibits, Penny can be seen to have re-entered the Academy arena in 1776 with an even grander and more ambitious exhibition work. Taking as its subject the fate of another beautiful but ill-fated medieval royal mistress, *Jane Shore Led to Do Penance at St Paul's* (fig. 74) recreates one of the pivotal scenes in the legendary narrative of Shore's life. As traditional accounts relate, Shore had captured the affections of Edward IV and, disregarding her marriage vows to Matthew Shore, a reputable London goldsmith, pursued an adulterous liaison with her royal admirer.<sup>281</sup> After Edward's death in 1483, however, she fell spectacularly from her position of power and influence.

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<sup>281</sup> Thomas More's *History of King Richard III*, written in c.1514 and published over two decades later in 1543, includes the earliest known account of Shore's life. It is this description of the royal mistress which appears to have formed the basis, directly or indirectly, for all later treatments of the story. For further information on More's account, see James L. Harner, 'Jane Shore in Literature: A Checklist', *Notes and Queries*, vol. 28, no. 6 (December 1981): 496-507. For a wider ranging discussion of Shore's place in the English literary tradition, see Harry W. Pedicord (ed.), *The Tragedy of Jane Shore* (London, 1975), pp. xiii-xxvii and Maria M. Scott, *Re-Presenting 'Jane' Shore: Harlot and Heroine* (Aldershot, 2005).

Through her close association with William, Lord Hastings, the former King's friend and chamberlain, Shore attracted the ire of England's new ruler Richard, Duke of Gloucester, against whom Hastings had plotted. Richard, who had now seized the throne, took revenge by executing Hastings and forcing Shore to do public penance for her illicit relationship. She afterwards lived out her days in penury and disgrace as a beggar in the streets of London.

Penny's picture dramatizes Shore's tragic fall, showing her being conducted through the streets of London to St Paul's Cathedral, where she was to undergo the rite of penitence, the traditional Catholic ritual by which a sinner was reconciled with the Church. At the centre of the image, we see Shore making her way unsteadily forwards. Bearing the traditional symbols of penitence – the shapeless white sheet she clutches to her frail body and the lighted taper in her left hand – she presents a forlorn and pitiful figure. The loss of dignity she has just suffered is further underlined by her gaze, which is shamefully directed towards the ground, whilst her loose and unkempt hair provides a clear sign of her distressed and downtrodden state.

Shore's ignominy, moreover, is both witnessed – and heightened – by the contemptuous crowd that spills into the margins of the image. To the left, we see a trio of disdainful citizens who march implacably behind the helpless protagonist. Whilst the first of these figures, a young mother shown holding a suckling infant, stares coldly and impassively at Shore's bent form, the two characters beside her, a middle-aged woman and a respectably dressed man, openly mock the heroine with derisive applause and heartless smiles. Their scornful responses are mirrored, in turn, by the two young boys who walk alongside them. Again, these characters, acting with unselfconscious malice, are shown staring fixedly ahead and clapping mercilessly at the fallen mistress.

To the right, meanwhile, we see the dignitaries in charge of conducting Shore to the cathedral. The priest, identifiable by his tonsured hair and the processional cross he holds aloft, stands at their head with an expression of solemn indifference. Beside him, the two uniformed officers who oversee the spectacle march defiantly forward. The corpulent staff-bearer in the foreground, who commands our attention with his direct and challenging stare, presents a particularly unsympathetic figure. As his

furrowed brow and rigid stance suggest, he is stolidly determined to carry out the ritual humiliation without lenience or compassion. It is from him, we must assume, that the guards who occupy the centre ground receive their orders. Heavily armoured and bearing a formidable array of glaives and spears, these characters fend off the tumultuous mob that stretches rank upon rank into the distance, ensuring that their prisoner's punishment is duly accomplished.

Looking beyond the crowd, we encounter the evocative forms of the medieval city. A battlemented and balconied palace provides the setting for the King and his court, while a succession of jettied houses, their windows and roofs inhabited by leering spectators, line the winding street. London's distinctive topography is no less evident in the carefully delineated skyline, which is dominated by the pinnacled silhouette of St Paul's to the right and by the cluster of ancient spires and towers that rise above the distant horizon. Clearly, it would seem that no effort was spared to capture every detail of the historic townscape that provides the backdrop to this iconic narrative.

The obvious source for Penny's painting is Nicholas Rowe's *The Tragedy of Jane Shore*, one of the century's most celebrated theatrical productions. Debuting at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane on 2 February 1714, Rowe's play had proved so popular that it was instantly published in two editions and then repeatedly revived in London's playhouses over successive seasons.<sup>282</sup> Indeed, at the time Penny produced his painting, Rowe's drama was a recurrent feature of the standard dramatic repertoire, attaining the status of an undisputed classic.<sup>283</sup> As a comparison between Penny's image and Rowe's text shows, the artist was clearly seeking to capitalise on the enduring success of this theatrical sensation. While Shore's penance takes place offstage and is therefore not directly represented in the play, it is nevertheless described in vivid detail in the first speeches of the final act. Here, Shore's husband, having encountered his friend Bellmour in the street, learns of his wife's distressing

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<sup>282</sup> George Winchester Stone has noted that, by the end of the century, the play had been performed more than 300 times. Stone cited in Pedicord (ed.), *The Tragedy of Jane Shore*, p. xx.

<sup>283</sup> The play was performed throughout the 1770s in multiple productions. For the productions in the years leading up to the exhibition of Penny's painting, see Stone (ed.), *The London Stage*, pt. 4, vol. 3, pp. 1510-954. Interestingly, Horace Walpole's correspondence recounts that Rowe's play was chosen for re-enactment by a group of aristocratic amateurs at Holland House, suggesting that it was also a particular favourite in the highest reaches of elite society. See Horace Walpole's letter to George Montagu, dated 22 January 1761, in Helen Paget Toynbee (ed.), *The Letters of Horace Walpole: Fourth Earl of Orford* (16 vols) (Oxford, 1903-1905), vol. 5, pp. 18-19.

journey to St Paul's. The account that follows provides a striking precedent for Penny's portrayal of the scene:

Submissive, sad and lowly was her Look;  
 A burning Taper in her Hand she bore,  
 And on her Shoulders carelessly confus'd  
 With loose Neglect her lovely Tresses hung;  
 Upon her Cheek a faintish Flush was spread,  
 Feeble she seem'd, and sorely smit with Pain,  
 While bare-foot as she trod the flinty Pavement,  
 Her Footsteps all along were mark'd with Blood.  
 Yet silent still she pass'd and unrepining;  
 Her streaming Eyes bent ever on the Earth...<sup>284</sup>

Looking to Penny's picture, we see a similarly tormented protagonist. Just as in Rowe's scene, Shore undergoes her ordeal with bended head, her hair in disarray and her eyes cast shamefully downwards. Even more strikingly, her cheek clearly shows the 'faintish flush' that Bellmour describes in his speech.

No less significant are the resemblances between those figures that accompany Shore in Penny's image and their counterparts in Rowe's play. From Bellmour's report, we learn that

Before her, certain Rascal Officers  
 Slaves in Authority, the Knaves of Justice,  
 Proclaim'd the cruel tyrant Gloster's cruel Orders.  
 On either Side her march'd an ill look'd Priest,  
 Who with severe, with horrid haggard Eyes,  
 Did ever and anon by Turns upbraid her  
 And thunder in her trembling Ear Damnation...<sup>285</sup>

Notwithstanding the fact that Penny has portrayed one priest rather than two, in both cases we find similar groups of religious and civil officials who callously mistreat

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<sup>284</sup> Nicholas Rowe, *The Tragedy of Jane Shore* (London, 1714), pp. 49-50.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

the heroine. Moreover, Rowe also pictures Shore surrounded by a hostile and abusive crowd of bystanders:

Around her numberless the Rabble flow'd  
Shouldring each other, crowding for a View,  
Gaping and Gazing, Taunting and Reviling...<sup>286</sup>

Penny's image can clearly be seen as an attempt to actualise Rowe's description in pictorial form. The pallid urchin to the left, shown intrusively craning his neck to peer over the guard's shoulder, immediately brings to mind the 'rabble ...crowding for a View', while the jeering man who stands directly behind Shore evokes the 'taunting and reviling' mob.

For every aspect of Penny's scene, then, we find a direct analogue in Rowe's literary production. Yet, in spite of all these manifest similarities, there are good reasons to think that Penny was not simply producing a straightforward visual equivalent of the playwright's celebrated work. Through comparing Penny's image to the other visual sources related to Rowe's play, it becomes clear that his work exhibits certain unique and intriguing characteristics. Turning first to the illustrations that accompanied the early editions of the play, it is striking that the particular scene chosen by Penny as his subject is never represented. Indeed, all the illustrated editions that predate the artist's picture show the climactic final scene of the last act when the dying Shore is reconciled with her estranged husband. With one exception, these replicate the frontispiece to the 1714 edition and portray a band of armed men arresting Shore's husband as he attends to his prostrate wife in a London street (fig. 75). In contrast to the prolific array of characters that haphazardly throng Penny's painting, the main figures within these images form a self-contained and elegantly posed group in the centre of the picture space. As such, even though these illustrations situate their action in a similarly extensive urban setting, they are nevertheless conspicuously different in character and composition from the later artist's work. This is also the case with the remaining illustration, the frontispiece to the 1775 edition (fig. 76). Whilst this is unique in departing from the repetitive formula of the earlier publications, it again reproduces the play's final scene in a similarly conventional manner. Like its predecessors, this image also deploys a straightforward

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<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*

compositional arrangement, this time consisting of only five characters in heavily stylised poses. Just as Shore clings histrionically to her imploring husband, the officer at the door gestures him out with exaggerated authority. Without the familiar urban setting of the earlier illustrations, moreover, this image appears still more remote from Penny's highly complex scene.

Nor does Penny's work appear any more similar to the painted representations of Rowe's play that were produced in the period. Rather than presenting a series of elaborately rendered historical scenes, these images were almost invariably portraits of particular stage actresses in the role of Jane Shore.<sup>287</sup> One such example is John Kitchingman's miniature painting of *Mrs Yates in the Character of Jane Shore*, exhibited at the Academy in 1770.<sup>288</sup> Although this painting is now untraced, it is clear from the work's title and its suitably diminutive proportions, that it was not meant to be appreciated as anything other than a straightforward theatrical portrait. Reynolds's *Mrs Hartley as Jane Shore* (fig. 77), completed in 1773 but never exhibited, does bear some similarities to Penny's representation: in both works, Shore is shown in profile, her pale skin framed by her loose hair. However, even these similarities cannot counterbalance the more significant differences. Like Kitchingman's work, Reynolds's *Jane Shore* was also conceived as an explicitly theatrical piece.<sup>289</sup> Showing the celebrated tragic actress Elizabeth Hartley in role and crouching plaintively at the base of a shadowy wall, Reynolds's modest single-figure portrait displays none of the visual and narrative complexity of Penny's *Jane Shore Led to Do Penance*. Even the artist's own *A Scene from 'Jane Shore'* (fig. 7) from 1762, which might be seen to offer an obvious precedent for his Academy

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<sup>287</sup> The one exception amongst this body of images is James Durno's *Jane Shore Doing Penance* from 1770. According to the listing in the Society of Artists' exhibition catalogue for that same year, the scene was inspired by Tobias Smollett's account of Shore in the fifth volume of his *Complete History of England*, published between 1757 and 1765. By referring in such a direct way to this much-acclaimed historical work rather than to Rowe's play, it is clear that Durno, anticipating Penny's later scene, intended his image to be read primarily as a historical work rather than as a theatrical portrait. Unfortunately, Durno's image remains untraced but some idea of its likely appearance is provided by a book illustration of 1746 similarly entitled 'Jane Shore Does Penance in St. Paul's Church'. This suggests that Durno's work also showed an interior view of St. Paul's and was therefore not a direct source of inspiration for Penny's 1776 image. For the book illustration, see John Lockman, *A New History of England by Question and Answer* (London, 1752), pl. 19. Durno's painting is listed as item no. 39 in *A Catalogue of the Pictures...Exhibited at the Great Room, in Spring-Garden, Charing Cross, April the Sixteenth, 1770, by the Royal Incorporated Society of Artists of Great Britain* (London, 1770), p. 5.

<sup>288</sup> See item no. 121 in *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy, MDCCLXX*, p. 13.

<sup>289</sup> For more information on the production of Reynolds's image, see Mannings, *Sir Joshua Reynolds*, vol. 1, p. 246.

exhibit, presents a very different kind of image to the later painting. Not only does this picture dramatize an alternative episode from Rowe's drama, that of the final exchange between the dying heroine and her husband, but it once again restricts its focus to a small number of figures and treats them in a manner strikingly reminiscent of a theatrical performance. For instance, Shore, besides being pictured in profile and with characteristically bedraggled hair, assumes a highly melodramatic pose. Sprawled upon the ground, she is shown raising one hand imploringly towards the viewer whilst pointing back with the other towards the kneeling figure of her husband.

Thus, whilst Penny clearly drew heavily on Rowe's drama for the narrative framework of his 1776 image, he sidestepped what had become the most prominent strands of graphic and painted imagery to which it had given rise. Why, then, did the artist choose to bypass an established visual tradition with proven appeal in favour of a scene that, although central to the story, represented an off-stage action with few related models to act as a guide? To answer this question, it is necessary to turn first to the ballad and chapbook tradition which had earlier proved so important to Penny's conception of *Rosamond and Queen Eleanor*, his last Academy exhibit to show an English historical subject.

Just as with *Rosamond*, it appears that such sources provided Penny with critically important references for his representation of Shore. Having first appeared in the mid-sixteenth century in several competing versions, ballad editions of Shore's story were published repeatedly throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>290</sup> Most of these reproduced the same basic text – an anonymous reworking of Thomas Deloney's *A New Sonnet, Containing the Lamentation of Shore's Wife* from 1593 – and were often accompanied by crude but vivid illustrations.<sup>291</sup> Significantly, none of these images appear to have shown Shore's destitution and demise. Instead, they tended to portray her on her way to do penance and, as such, provide a striking precedent for Penny's choice of scene. These parallels are particularly apparent in the woodcut that appeared in the 1660 chapbook *The History of Mistris Jane Shore*

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<sup>290</sup> For an exhaustive listing of the various ballad treatments of Shore's story, see Harner, 'Jane Shore in Literature'.

<sup>291</sup> This composition's central importance within ballad tradition is discussed in James L. Harner, "'The Wofull Lamentation of Mistris Jane Shore': The Popularity of an Elizabethan Ballad', *The Papers of the Bibliographic Society of America*, vol. 71 (1977): 137-49.

(fig. 78). As in Penny's later scene, Shore is portrayed with a white sheet wrapped around her body and a burning taper in her hand. Moreover, she is being driven forward by a stern-looking officer who can again be identified by his staff and cocked hat. The priest who leads the procession is absent here but we do find this feature prominently represented in another related source, Ambrose Philips's *A Collection of Old Ballads* from 1723 (fig. 79). Philips, reprinting the ballad's traditional text, included an illustration which, for the first time, depicted Shore as part of a similarly spectacular penitential procession. Peopled with clerics, soldiers and a crowd of raging Londoners, this complex composition must surely stand as an important prototype for Penny's image.

In the same way that the ballad and chapbook tradition served as a crucial pictorial reference for Penny's work, we also find that it was no less important as a textual source. Indeed, Shore's journey to St. Paul's is described at length in the ballad accounts of the story and Penny appears to have drawn on them extensively in his use of narrative detail. Thomas Deloney's early version of the ballad, for example, has Shore recount the episode in the following terms:

And a Procession,  
For my Transgression,  
Bare-footed he made me go:  
for to shame me,  
A Cross before me there was carried plainly,  
As a Pennance to my former Life...<sup>292</sup>

The distinctive way that Deloney describes the cross being carried before Shore strikingly foreshadows the cross-bearer's leading position in Penny's image. There are similarly close correspondences to be found in the later anonymous ballad, *The Wofull Lamentation of Jane Shore*.<sup>293</sup> As well as telling us that Shore made her way through the city streets 'In shamefull manner in a sheet', this ballad also makes

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<sup>292</sup> Thomas Deloney, 'A New Sonnet, Containing the Lamentation of Shore's Wife, Who was Sometime Concubine to King Edward the Fourth, Setting Forth her Great Fall, and Withall her Most Miserable and Wretched End', reprinted under the title 'The Lamentation of Shore's Wife' in *The Garland of Good-Will...Containing Many Pleasant Songs and Poems* (1631; London, 1710), not paginated.

<sup>293</sup> Anon., 'The Wofull Lamentation of Jane Shore, a Goldsmith's Wife in London, Sometime King Edward IV's Concubine' (1620), reprinted in both Ambrose Philips's *A Collection of Old Ballads* (London, 1723), pp. 145-58 and Percy's *Reliques*, pp. 252-58.

special mention of the King's attendants and courtiers who were once Shore's associates but now oversee her disgrace:

Where many thousands did me viewe,  
Who late in court my credit knewe:  
Which made the teares run down my face,  
To thinke upon my foul disgrace...<sup>294</sup>

This description of 'many thousands' of courtiers would seem to offer the most probable antecedent for Penny's minutely detailed rendering of the King and his entourage in the background of the picture. Even more suggestive, however, is the way that the same ballad characterises Shore's mistreatment at the hands of London's citizenry:

Thus was I scorn'd of maid and wife,  
For leading such a wicked life;  
Both sucking babes, and children small,  
Did make their pastime at my fall...<sup>295</sup>

Looking at the left-most figure group in Penny's painting, we find suggestive parallels with the various characters mentioned in this verse. The stout young woman who strides forward with a child pressed to her breast must surely represent the 'wife' with one of the 'sucking babes' identified in the rhyme. Beside them, the pair of boys who clap derisively at Shore can be related to the 'children small [who] make their pastime at [the penitent mistress's] fall'. Finally, given these similarities, we can reasonably see the elderly woman who walks in the midst of Penny's group as a disapproving spinster or archetypal 'old' maid.

This extensive pattern of connections between Penny's painting and both the dramatic and ballad traditions suggests that the artist was returning to – and consciously developing – a mode of practice he had pioneered with his earlier *Rosamond*. As we have seen, that other picture sought to combine the literary prestige and sentimental appeal of Addison's *Rosamond: An Opera* with the

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<sup>294</sup> 'The Wofull Lamentation of Jane Shore'; Philips, *A Collection*, p. 150; and Percy, *Reliques*, p. 255.

<sup>295</sup> 'The Wofull Lamentation of Jane Shore'; Philips, *A Collection*, p. 152; and Percy, *Reliques*, p. 257.

universality and authentically ‘English’ identity of the ballads from which it drew. Redeploying the same strategy, Penny’s newest work again took a celebrated sentimental heroine from a classic play whilst making extensive use of the popular ballad and chapbook tradition to reinforce his subject’s historical authenticity and indigenous character. Rowe’s drama provided Penny with a dignified literary context for his image and guaranteed its appropriateness for the Academy. It also provided a protagonist who – in spite of her morally ambiguous status – underwent travails so severe that she reliably engaged the sympathetic attentions of contemporary audiences. Indeed, as the anonymously published *A Review of the Tragedy of Jane Shore* from 1714 makes clear, Rowe’s ‘Description of...Shore’s Pennance, and her Demeanour under that publick Shame...cannot help moving Compassion...[there is no] Audience of any Humanity [that can] hear this Part without some soft Emotions’.<sup>296</sup> At the same time, by choosing a subject that was so deeply rooted in popular folklore and the vernacular tradition, Penny was able to endow his image with the historical and narrative specificity that identified it as a truly ‘British’ production. Ballads, it should be remembered, had been highly praised by writers such as Addison for their lack of affectation and genuineness of sentiment, and for these reasons were taken to represent the most authentic kind of native artistry.<sup>297</sup> With its conspicuous fidelity to these sources, Penny’s image clearly aspired to situate this archetypally vernacular art form at the heart of the Academy. Just as he had done with *Rosamond*, then, Penny was bringing together a whole series of diverse pictorial and textual precedents to create an image with genuinely and even patriotic universal appeal.

What sets Penny’s newest work apart from his *Rosamond*, however, is the unprecedented grandeur of its conception. Whereas the relatively simple two-figure composition and intimate atmosphere of the earlier painting are typical of the genre tradition, the scale and compositional complexity of *Jane Shore Led to Do Penance* tie it more closely to the grand historical works which were regarded at this time as the pinnacle of artistic achievement. Two works in particular stand out as important precedents for Penny’s painting, Benjamin West’s *Agrippina Landing at Brundisium*

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<sup>296</sup> Anon., *A Review of the Tragedy of Jane Shore; Consisting of Observations on the Characters, Manners, Stile, and Sentiments* (London, 1714), pp. 20-21.

<sup>297</sup> For more on Addison and the critical reception of the English ballad tradition, see Chapter 2, Section 1 above, pp. 103-106.

with the Ashes of Germanicus (fig. 80), exhibited at the Society of Artists in 1768, and Gavin Hamilton's almost identically entitled *Agrippina Landing at Brundisium with the Ashes of Germanicus* (fig. 81), exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1772. Showing the classical heroine Agrippina carrying her murdered husband's ashes through a crowd of sympathetic onlookers, these paintings share a number of striking similarities with Penny's later image.<sup>298</sup> Most obviously, both pictures feature a distressed and vulnerable female protagonist of the kind that conformed precisely to contemporary ideals of sensibility. Like Shore, Agrippina is pitiful yet dignified and presents a highly affecting figure capable of inspiring compassion and sympathy in the viewer.<sup>299</sup> Furthermore, the close thematic relation between these artists' works is paralleled by their treatment of the central character. Not only is Agrippina depicted in profile within West's and Hamilton's images, but she is draped in a long mantel and her head is bowed towards the ground. As such, her pose and general appearance closely prefigure Penny's representation of Shore.

No less importantly, West's and Hamilton's paintings centre upon a procession that extends across the picture plane and which forms the focus of attention for the crowds of spectators who witness the protagonist's sufferings. In West's painting, Agrippina stands at the head of a retinue of children and female servants, making a striking counterpart to the figures that surround Shore. In addition, whilst West's overall composition is quite different to Penny's, there are nevertheless telling similarities between the figures who line the city walls behind Agrippina and the courtiers who fill the balcony to the rear of Shore. Even clearer parallels are to be found between Hamilton's work and Penny's image. As well as depicting Agrippina, like Shore, advancing steadily through a surging throng of bystanders, Hamilton's image also deploys a tripartite compositional arrangement that places the heroine at the centre of the scene with the corresponding figures of a male standard-bearer and

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<sup>298</sup> West's and Hamilton's theme was a classic and much-recounted episode from Tacitus and the history of imperial Rome. For more on these artists' decision to portray this subject, see von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, pp. 179-80 and Duncan Macmillan, *Painting in Scotland: The Golden Age* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 41-42.

<sup>299</sup> Agrippina's status as an archetypally sentimental heroine may account for her frequent depiction by both painters and engravers throughout the second half of the eighteenth century. Just two years prior to exhibiting his *Agrippina Landing at Brundisium with the Ashes of Germanicus*, for instance, Hamilton had painted *Agrippina Weeping over the Ashes of Germanicus*, a single figure portrait which he also displayed at the Academy in 1770. Other artists who portrayed the subject include James Nevay and Alexander Runciman. For more on the theme's popularity, see Macmillan, *Painting in Scotland*, p. 42.

a female attendant on either side of her. Moreover, Hamilton's inclusion of several other pivotal figures – namely a young mother with her infant son, shown seated to the left of the harbour steps; the two animated children who precede Agrippina; and the armoured guards who stand in the middle distance brandishing spears in the air – closely echoes Penny's choice of characters. It is almost as though Penny can be seen to have taken the template provided by Hamilton's work and, albeit in reverse, used it as the structural framework for his own production. In fact, with Hamilton's conspicuously enlarged figures and unusually congested composition providing another compelling link with Penny's painting, we can say that the later artist's work stands as the natural successor to this ambitious and evocative history painting.

Looking beyond the many thematic and compositional similarities displayed by these pictures, it also seems that they share a common concern with historical accuracy and the representation of place and costume. The faithful recreation of ancient topography and attire was a necessary requisite of classical history painting, and West and Hamilton clearly sought to fulfil this requirement by producing scenes that incorporated a wealth of authentic historical detail. For instance, in relation to the issue of dress, each artist can be seen to have clothed their protagonists in characteristic Roman garb. Thus, in both West's and Hamilton's paintings the women are shown wearing long pleated tunics and flowing mantels whilst the men are clad in loose-fitting togas and rugged military uniforms. The same degree of attention to historical exactitude is evident in the architectural settings of these images. West's backdrop is dominated by a building directly derived from the outer walls of Diocletian's palace at Split, which had been recently reproduced as one of the plates in Robert and James Adam's lavish folio publication *The Ruins of the Palace of the Emperor Diocletian at Spalatro* from 1764.<sup>300</sup> Similarly, Hamilton's picture includes an impressive reconstruction of another famous Roman monument, the Temple of Fortuna Virilis in Rome, for which the most likely source is the elevation published in Andrea Palladio's *Quattro Libri dell'Architettura* from 1570.<sup>301</sup> Both artists evidently took pains to identify the most reliable archaeological information available at the time and to reproduce it in a highly literal way.

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<sup>300</sup> Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, p. 180.

<sup>301</sup> Palladio's *Quattro Libri* was republished many times over succeeding centuries and translated into several different languages, including two full English translations, those of Giacomo Leoni's four-

In the same vein, Penny can be seen to have aspired to a comparable level of precision in his depiction of English historical costume and architecture. Although the study of non-classical historic costume was in its infancy at this time, precluding complete accuracy in this area, Penny evidently made considerable efforts to locate appropriate examples of archaic dress. Whilst the officer on the right is dressed in a doublet with breeches cut in the voluminous beribboned style characteristic of the early seventeenth century, the young mother on the far left wears a dress with puffed and slashed sleeves typical of the later sixteenth century. Similarly, the guards are clad in kettle hats, gorgets and tunics reminiscent of the armour worn in the late-Tudor and early-Stuart periods. The use of ancient models is equally apparent in Penny's depiction of the jettied, half-timbered houses that lean precariously into the street behind Shore. The artist, we can assume, would have been familiar with buildings of this type as they still survived in considerable numbers on the fringes of the city.<sup>302</sup> For his portrayal of Old St Paul's, however, it is clear that Penny drew on the standard historical account of the medieval cathedral, William Dugdale's *History of St. Paul's Cathedral in London* from 1658 (fig. 82). Dugdale's work was illustrated with Wenceslas Hollar's famous engravings of the ancient structure and Penny used these as the direct source for his image. Indeed, almost every aspect of the artist's representation of St Paul's corresponds with Hollar's view of the cathedral's East End. This includes not only the use of a common viewpoint but also such details as the placement of the pinnacles, the arched East window with its traceried opening and the carved ornament at the apex of the gable. The artist's consistent employment of original source materials, then, implies an almost scholarly approach to painting that conformed closely to West's and Hamilton's practice. Once again, this suggests that Penny's *Jane Shore Led to Do Penance* should be seen as an attempt to formulate a truly British equivalent to the classical historical works of the artist's most celebrated colleagues.<sup>303</sup>

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volume *The Architecture of A. Palladio*, published between [1715]-20, and Isaac Ware's *The Four Books of Andrea Palladio's Architecture*, published in 1738.

<sup>302</sup> For numerous photographs documenting the survival of medieval and Tudor buildings as late as the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Philip Davies, *Lost London 1870-1945* (London, 2009).

<sup>303</sup> It is noteworthy that Hamilton was resident in Rome for most of his career and active not only as a history painter but also as an archaeologist and antiquities dealer. The high reputation he gained as a result of his first-hand experience of classical culture made him an ideal model for Penny to follow. Hamilton's Roman career is detailed in David Irwin, 'Gavin Hamilton: Archaeologist, Painter and Dealer', *Art Bulletin*, vol. 44, no. 2 (June 1962): 87-102.

Yet, it is precisely this attempt to produce a recognisably ‘English’ and thus highly localised form of academic history painting that can be seen to have given rise to a whole series of tensions within Penny’s work. By including such distinctively non-classical subject matter and pictorial detail in a work that aspired to the status of ‘grand manner’ historical art, the artist was essentially seeking to reconcile two very different pictorial modes. This emerges most clearly in the contrasting – and arguably contradictory – handling of Shore and the figures around her. Fittingly, given the native origins of Penny’s subject matter, the latter characters are heavily particularised. With their robust ‘British’ physiques and unexceptional features, it is difficult not to see these as portraits from life. Indeed, according to a Penny family tradition, they were based on the artist’s own relatives; and even if mythical, this tale’s currency surely reflects the way that Penny seems to have captured the individual idiosyncrasies of his models.<sup>304</sup>

Clearly, this is a painting that asks its audience to recognise in these characters their own historical antecedents. It is, so to speak, a painting of Londoners for Londoners. Shore, by contrast, is a distinctly idealised figure. Her profile has been flattened and regularised whilst her individual features – chin, nose and forehead – are small and delicate, giving her an otherworldly, almost ethereal air. Her body, too, has been elongated and attenuated and, instead of stout woollen stuffs, she is cloaked in a flowing white robe and mauve shift that endow her form with an almost abstract simplicity. Resembling, in all these respects, West’s and Hamilton’s heroising portrayals of Agrippina, Penny’s Shore bears all the hallmarks of a classicising idiom.

Through being placed amongst such strongly individualised characters, however, Penny’s canonical heroine appears strangely insubstantial and incongruous. Whereas the other figures have an extremely strong physical and psychological presence, Shore appears etiolated and formulaic. That Penny, on some level, was aware of this is apparent from the unsatisfying treatment of Shore’s profile. In this area of the painting, the artist’s usually deft and confident brushwork breaks down into a confused tangle of hesitant strokes. Shore’s forehead, for instance, appears laboured and uncertain, its contours lost in layers of nervously cross-hatched paint, whilst the

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<sup>304</sup> Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, object file for *Jane Shore Led to Do Penance*.

lower part of her face dissolves into the background in an incoherent blur. The handling of Shore's hair is no more successful, particularly where it meets her face. The paint here appears almost scrubbed or scratched and bears the traces of multiple corrections, and whilst some of this no doubt reflects Penny's desire to convey Shore's bedraggled condition, the overall impression is infelicitous to say the least. But these passages were not the sum of Penny's troubles, for he seems to have struggled to attain even basic anatomical accuracy at this point in his work: Shore's thickly worked ear is placed too far forward on her head; her mouth and chin are rendered as little more than a simplistic sequence of loops; and her cheek and jaw are fused into a formless sheet of flesh-coloured paint. This critically important figure, in other words, appears to have been rethought and reworked without being satisfactorily resolved. Not only does the paint itself form a crude impasto that disrupts the smoothness of the picture surface, but the representational integrity of the image is compromised by Shore's oddly proportioned features. The result is that where we would expect to find the heroic centre of the painting there is instead an area of weakness and indecisiveness.

Nor is this the only problematic aspect of the painting: a parallel set of tensions is perceptible in the narrative and compositional treatment as well. On the one hand, Shore occupies the literal centre of the image and, in this sense, can be seen as its formal and psychological focus. Yet, it is the figure that stands before her that seems to dominate the image. Not only is he distinguished by his greater physical bulk and bold stance, but he is also the only character in the entire painting whose gaze engages the viewer directly. The result is that, as we scan the image to ascertain its narrative content, our eyes tend to settle on this figure rather than on Shore. Competing with the heroine for our attention, this ostensibly secondary character becomes the crucial pivot point within the image.

Indeed, it is difficult to avoid the impression that Penny was consciously emphasising this figure for a specific narrative purpose, even at the cost of marginalising his main protagonist. That this was the case is confirmed by the painting's original subtitle. As the Academy's 1776 catalogue reveals, this took the form of a statement which, pointedly condemning the misuse of authority, proclaimed that 'The insolent in office, and pretenders to purity, by mistreating the

wretched, betray their own baseness'.<sup>305</sup> Apparently of Penny's own invention, these words once again direct our attention away from Shore and towards the figure that precedes her.<sup>306</sup> With his unmistakably arrogant bearing and his status as an officer made manifest by his ceremonial staff, this character epitomises the abuses of power that the artist's subtitle so emphatically condemns.

Moreover, this figure's significance appears still greater in the light of contemporary representations of corrupt officialdom, of which the most striking example is Matthew Darly's *The Well Fed English Constable* (fig. 83) from 1771. This widely-circulated print presents a biting critique of the manifold depredations for which parish constables, the most familiar petty officials in eighteenth-century England, were notorious. As the officer in charge of maintaining civil order, the constable was expected to safeguard his fellow citizens from crime and disorder. However, constables were elected volunteers rather than paid professionals; frequently poor and ill-educated, they became notorious for their bullying behaviour and propensity to take bribes.<sup>307</sup>

In Darly's print, these undesirable traits are all too clearly in evidence: whilst the constable's cruelty is intimated by his vicious-looking dogs, his venality is symbolised by his bulging pocket, from which protrude the legs of his latest payoff, presumably a plump chicken. The resemblance to Penny's officer is obvious. Not only do they share the same corpulent physique and self-satisfied air but they bear almost identical staves in their hands. So clear are the correspondences between the two images, in fact, that it seems reasonable to suppose that Penny's image was similarly intended to portray a corrupt constable. In evoking imagery like Darly's trenchant satire to portray 'the insolent in office', there can be little doubt that Penny was seeking to denounce those petty officials who exploited their power and authority to abuse the vulnerable.

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<sup>305</sup> See item no. 221 in *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy, MDCCLXXVI: The Eighth* (London, 1776), p. 20.

<sup>306</sup> Full text searches through the corpus of pre-1800 English publications have failed to yield any literary source for Penny's subtitle.

<sup>307</sup> For more on the role of parish constables and their iniquities as well as a comprehensive discussion of policing in the capital, see Elaine Reynolds, *Before the Bobbies: The Night Watch and Police Reform in Metropolitan London 1720-1830* (Palo Alto, 1998), and Andrew T. Harris, *Policing the City: Crime and Legal Authority in London 1780-1840* (Ohio, 2004).

Jane Shore's story, we can therefore suggest, has become the vehicle for an otherwise elusive moralising subtext. There are, moreover, reasons to think that this subtext would have been especially relevant to Londoners in the mid-1770s. At this time, the policing of the city of London had become a matter of public dispute through the activities of the recently re-founded Society for the Reformation of Manners. Under the influence of revivalist preachers such as George Whitefield and John Wesley, the society had lobbied for more stringent application of the laws on public order and had succeeded in persuading the Court of Aldermen of London to appoint several of its members as extra constables with authority throughout the city.<sup>308</sup> These 'reforming' constables rapidly attained notoriety for their zealous pursuit of vice and immorality, particularly such sexual misdemeanours as homosexuality and prostitution.<sup>309</sup>

The heavy-handed suppression of these offences provoked great controversy. To their sympathisers the new constables were defenders of public morality and religious respect; but to their opponents, they were pharisaical hypocrites whose hounding of poor and vulnerable prostitutes betrayed their lack of authentic Christian charity. As Joanna Innes has written, the reformers were condemned as 'bullying' and 'self-righteous busybodies' who were unfairly 'persecuting poor people, who were perhaps no better than they ought to be, but nonetheless did not deserve and would not profit from such merciless harassment'.<sup>310</sup>

These issues came to a head from 1775 onwards – at just the time that Penny would have been preparing his exhibit – following the reappointment of William Payne, the most famously intransigent of the reforming constables.<sup>311</sup> Payne's return to office enabled him to greatly strengthen his longstanding campaign against vice and prostitution. Indeed, as Tony Henderson's recent analysis of prostitution in

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<sup>308</sup> For more on London's reforming constables and their connection with the Society for the Reformation of Manners, see Joanna Innes, 'The Protestant Carpenter—William Payne of Bell Yard (c.1718-82): The Life and Times of a London Informing Constable', in *idem*, *Inferior Politics: Social Problems and Social Policies in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 279-341, esp. p. 294 and fn. 61.

<sup>309</sup> See Famerz Dabhoiwala, 'Sex, Social Relations and the Law in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century London', in Michael Braddick and John Walter (eds), *Negotiating Power in Early Modern Society: Order, Hierarchy and Subordination in Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 85-101, 262-67 and *idem*, 'Sex and Societies for Moral Reform, 1688-1800', *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 46, no. 2 (2007): 290-319.

<sup>310</sup> Innes, 'The Protestant Carpenter', pp. 291-95.

<sup>311</sup> Payne's lengthy career as a reforming constable is chronicled in detail in *ibid.*, pp. 279-341.

eighteenth-century London shows, Payne was responsible for arresting over three-quarters of the streetwalkers who were brought to the Guildhall Justice Room between 1775 and 1780.<sup>312</sup>

From the very beginning, this increasingly intense repression of poor prostitutes provoked starkly opposed reactions, as a series of interrelated reports and letters published in the newspapers of the time reveal. Payne's activities first came to the attention of the reading public on 10 February 1775, when the *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* reported that 'Mr Payne, the Constable, headed a small party of his brother officers' in a raid on a brothel in Black Boy Alley. Finding 'several common thieves in bed with common prostitutes', Payne arrested them all, tying them into pairs with the derisive comment 'that it was a pity to part man and wife'. They were then taken to the Guildhall to be tried before the Lord Mayor, who at that time was the radical politician John Wilkes. Wilkes commended Payne for his troubles and promptly committed sixteen of the women to Bridewell prison.<sup>313</sup>

A few days later, Payne seems to have directed his attention to street prostitutes, as the same newspaper reported that 'eighteen women of the town were brought before Mr Alderman Newnham at Guildhall, and charged by a certain constable of the ward of Farringdon Without for wandering abroad and picking up men'. Farringdon Without was Payne's ward, and it is almost certainly to him that the article refers.<sup>314</sup> On this occasion, however, the constable received a less than welcoming reception. Newnham obviously belonged to the anti-reforming party and immediately discharged the alleged prostitutes. Payne protested with 'personal invectives and charged him with neglect of duty', to which the magistrate responded by initiating proceedings against the reforming constable at the Sessions of the Court of Aldermen.<sup>315</sup>

The resultant controversy evidently ran for months. Soon after, another newspaper, the *Morning Chronicle*, whose editors clearly sympathised with Payne's opponents, published a letter in praise of Newnham. Its author criticised not only Payne, whose

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<sup>312</sup> Tony Henderson, *Disorderly Women in Eighteenth-Century London: Prostitution and Control in the Metropolis 1730-1830* (London, 1999), p. 122.

<sup>313</sup> *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 10 February 1775.

<sup>314</sup> According to Joanna Innes, Payne was appointed as a deputy constable for the ward in 1771. See Innes, 'The Protestant Carpenter', p. 301.

<sup>315</sup> *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 14 February 1775.

‘improper behaviour... deserves the severest punishment’, but Wilkes himself, who was taken to task for ‘authorizing the apprehending of any poor unhappy women whom his officers may think proper to seize on’. This ‘invasion of public liberty’, he continues, ‘is sanctified by an assumed regard for morality’; yet he could not see ‘the meanest of mankind oppressed, without despising the oppressor’.<sup>316</sup> A supporter of Payne subsequently responded with a turgid defence of the man who ‘may be called the City Nocturnal Besom of destruction to vice and debauchery’. Only Payne, the writer continued, would

...bring to punishment the vermin of the stews, those pests to society, whose midnight revels are the causes of almost every species of evil in this city: when they, like poisonous toads, crawl from their holes to spread contagion through the gloom of night, ’tis your presence that causes them to re-enter their nauseous sties of filth, and fills them with more terror than if Diabolus himself, with all his hellish forms, had presented himself to view.<sup>317</sup>

A year later, when Penny exhibited his painting, the issue remained sufficiently contentious for the Society for Free Debate of Newgate Street to dedicate one of their sessions to the question of whether ‘those Constables who are remarkable for their vigilance, in apprehending the unfortunate women of the town, deserve censure or applause?’<sup>318</sup>

In *Jane Shore Led to Do Penance*, it therefore seems, Penny enlists our sympathetic response to Shore’s fall from grace to make a bold plea for the importance of humane and charitable conduct amongst the holders of public office. Taking a subject that in its original form possessed strong sentimental appeal but lacked a clear moral purpose, the artist reworked and rethought it in order to make it an appropriate vehicle for an otherwise elusive moralising subtext. This subtext, moreover, was carefully conceived not only as a powerful denunciation of corruption in public office, but also as a timely intervention in an unfolding contemporary debate about the harsh treatment of downtrodden women. Penny’s concern to invest his image with such moral import must be seen – once again – as part of his project

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<sup>316</sup> *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 24 February 1775.

<sup>317</sup> *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 1 June 1775.

<sup>318</sup> See Innes, ‘The Protestant Carpenter’, p. 308.

to create a new kind of history painting. In accordance with Shaftesbury's doctrine that historical subjects should have a didactic as well as an aesthetic purpose, Penny can be seen to have constructed an image that operates beyond the limits of mere narrative to edify and enlighten its viewers.

With its historical subject matter, its concern for antiquarian accuracy, and its unambiguous moral purpose, Penny's painting represents a daring attempt to forge a distinctly 'British' form of historical imagery. At the same time, however, the artist's newest and most ambitious piece aspired to be something more than a straightforward English equivalent of Hamilton's and West's history paintings. For Penny's image exhibits a clear concern for immediacy and accessibility that distinguishes it from the self-consciously elitist productions of his classicising contemporaries. A whole series of artistic and narrative devices serve to implicate the viewer in the unfolding scene: the subject-matter, with its familiar storyline redolent of both the popular ballad tradition and Rowe's more elevated theatrical production; the composition, which spills beyond the frame and unites the painting's fictive crowd with its actual audience; and the handling of character and place, which privileges the local and idiosyncratic in place of the idealised and abstract. Indeed, all these features imply that Penny wished to imbue his historical work with the anecdotal and sentimental qualities of genre painting, with its established popular appeal. But through seeking to reconcile such profoundly different – and even opposed – pictorial modes, Penny was confronted by aesthetic challenges that proved to be irresolvable, as the multiple tensions evident within the image attest. With *Jane Shore Led to Do Penance*, then, the artist was simply trying to do too much: in attempting to produce what should have been his greatest exhibition work, Penny showed that he had pushed his practice beyond its natural limits.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE ‘INGENIOUS MORAL PAINTER’

In the wake of the sustained programme of innovation and experiment that characterised his work of 1774-76, it seems that Penny's exhibition career again underwent something of a hiatus in the following years. After showing only portraits in 1777, he exhibited nothing at all in 1778. Only in 1779 did he return to exhibiting subject paintings, when he submitted two works, both now lost, listed as *The Return of the Chace* and *A Group of Children 'Sylvestrem tenui, etc'—Virgil*.<sup>319</sup> In the absence of the original pictures, it is impossible to be sure of their place in the artist's *oeuvre*. They are nevertheless of great interest, because, as their titles suggest, they clearly depicted scenes of rural life: the first presumably portrayed a fox hunt and, the last, given that it is accompanied by a quote from Virgil's great pastoral poem, the *Eclogues*, country children at play. Rural themes had been absent from Penny's exhibition works since his *Return from the Fair* was shown at the Society of Artists in 1765, and his return to them corresponds with wider developments in exhibition culture. In the late 1770s, works representing such subject matter had begun to attract increasing critical and public notice, and Penny responded by repeatedly exhibiting rural subjects from 1779 until his retirement in 1783. In addition to introducing new subject matter to his work, however, Penny, from 1780 onwards, appears to have returned to and substantially developed some of the most distinctive features of his earlier practice. The immediate trigger for this seems to have been the changing nature of exhibition culture during this period and, in particular, the challenge posed by the Academy's newly dignified and elevated surroundings after its recent move to Somerset House.

The Academy's new purpose-built apartments on the Strand (figs 84 & 85), which had been designed by William Chambers, stood in stark contrast to the somewhat antiquated and inadequate quarters it had formerly occupied in Pall Mall. As Guiseppe Baretti notes in his indispensable guide to the Academy's new home, Chambers's grand design scheme exploited the full potential of classical architecture

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<sup>319</sup> See item nos. 235 and 236 respectively in *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy, MDCCLXXIX: The Eleventh* (London, 1779), p. 19.

to create ‘an object of national splendour’ as well as ‘a monument of the taste and elegance of His Majesty’s reign’.<sup>320</sup> Not only was the imposing Strand façade ‘adorned with Pilasters, Entablatures, and Pediments’, but it featured a number of impressive sculptural decorations produced by some of the Academy’s most esteemed members. Amongst them were a series of ‘basso-relievo Medallions of the King, Queen and Prince of Wales’ by Joseph Wilton; ‘four colossal statues [of] venerable Men in senatorial robes’ by Agostino Carlini and Guiseppe Ceracchi; and, crowning the upper-most story of the building, ‘a Group, consisting of the Arms of the British Empire, supported on one side by the Genius of England [and] on the other by Fame sounding her trumpet’ by John Bacon the Elder.<sup>321</sup> Baretto describes how visitors, upon passing through the sumptuous tripartite entrance arch, found themselves in a ‘spacious and stately vestibule’ which opened onto the famous circular staircase that Chambers, ‘without prejudice either to its commodiousness or magnificence’, had managed to fit into the small space available.<sup>322</sup> Proceeding past the Academy’s expansive state apartments on the principal floor, visitors then ascended a final flight of stairs to gain access to the Great Exhibition Room, ‘the largest, and certainly the best of that sort in London’.<sup>323</sup> These magnificent and spacious surroundings, as contemporary newspaper critics also noted, enabled the Academy to host more extensive and impressive exhibitions than ever before.<sup>324</sup> The *Morning Chronicle*’s correspondent observed, for example, that ‘The grand exhibition room...is extremely well calculated for that display of paintings, which do this year...cover its four sides’; while a writer in the *Public Advertiser* enthusiastically claimed that ‘the happy Arrangement of the pictures, and Magnificence of the Apartments, render it a very grand *spectacle*, and not to be

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<sup>320</sup> Guiseppe Baretto, *A Guide through the Royal Academy* (London, 1781), pp. 3-4. For recent detailed accounts of the Academy’s palatial Strand premises, see John Murdoch, ‘Architecture and Experience: The Visitor and the Spaces of Somerset House, 1780-1796’, in David H. Solkin (ed.), *Art on the Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House, 1780-1836* (New Haven and London, 2001), pp. 9-22 and Hoock, *The King’s Artists*, pp. 37-43.

<sup>321</sup> Baretto, *A Guide*, pp. 5, 6.

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15. Chambers’s steep and spiralling staircase also came to hold great comic appeal for contemporary audiences, as Thomas Rowlandson’s well-known drawing *The Exhibition Stare Case* from c.1800 testifies. For more on this aspect of the Academy’s Strand premises, see K. Dian Kriz, ‘“Stare Cases”: Engendering the Public’s Two Bodies at the Royal Academy of Arts’, in Solkin (ed.), *Art on the Line*, pp. 55-63.

<sup>323</sup> Baretto, *A Guide*, p. 31.

<sup>324</sup> The Academy’s 1780 exhibition contained a staggering 489 exhibits. See *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy, MDCCLXXX: The Twelfth* (London, 1780), pp. 3-20.

equalled in any part of Europe'.<sup>325</sup> Contemporary illustrations (fig. 86) of the exhibition room vividly convey the towering ranks of pictures that crammed its walls and the jostling mass of spectators that came to see them. It was against this crowded and multifarious backdrop that individual works had to compete for attention.<sup>326</sup>

In his final years as an exhibitor, therefore, Penny was faced with the challenge of adapting his artistic strategy to meet the demands of the Academy's ever more prestigious and competitive environment. As I will seek to show in this chapter, this provoked a final shift in his artistic practice. Abandoning his previous attempts at conventional historical painting, Penny returned to the moralising model of genre painting that he had begun to develop in *The Profligate Punished* and *The Virtuous Comforted* but now applied it to the rural themes that he had taken up in 1779. For the first exhibition in the Academy's new home in 1780, Penny submitted a pair of paintings that, portraying contrasting views of *A Boy Taken Out of the Water Drowned* and *The Boy by Proper Means Recovered*, dramatized the story of a boy's near-fatal drowning and his chance rescue. As well as depicting a host of recognisable rural characters, each scene featured expansive fields and woodland, together with that most iconic rural motif—a cottage; but underpinning the rustic narrative depicted was a set of humanitarian and didactic concerns that tied Penny's images to advanced movements of social reform. In the same vein, the artist's 1781 submission, *Lavinia, Daughter of the Once Rich Acasto, Discovered Gleaning*, presented a classic harvest scene. Based on James Thomson's celebrated poem *The Seasons*, this image again provided the view of a sweeping rural landscape peopled by labouring men and women. Once more, however, there was a distinctive moral agenda at play that made Penny's treatment emphatically different from depictions of the same kind of scene by other artists. In his exhibition works of this period, the artist was finally – and fully – committing himself to a form of painting that was both highly accessible in its contemporaneity and assuredly dignified in its moralising aims.

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<sup>325</sup> *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 2 May 1780; *Public Advertiser*, 2 May 1780.

<sup>326</sup> For a concise but illuminating account of the mixed and often difficult viewing conditions engendered by the Academy's ever-growing displays at Somerset House, see David H. Solkin, 'This Great Mart of Genius': The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House, 1780-1836', in *idem* (ed.), *Art on the Line*, pp. 1-8.

## I

Penny's submission to the Academy's exhibition of 1780 comprised a large and impressive pair of companion pieces, *A Boy Taken Out of the Water Drowned* and *The Boy by Proper Means Recovered*. Although these paintings cannot now be located, they are recorded as having been in the collection of a prominent Russo-Armenian collector, Prince Vladimir Argoutinsky-Dolgoroukoff, in the early part of the twentieth century. Both paintings changed hands more recently through major auction rooms in London and New York, but neither the buyers nor the sellers are now known.<sup>327</sup> No other records of the images' provenance are available.

Fortunately, however, we do have several pieces of visual documentation at our disposal that record their appearance. Besides being reproduced as stipple engravings by William Sedgwick in 1784 (figs 87 & 88), both images were photographed – albeit in grainy black-and-white – while in the Argoutinsky-Dolgoroukoff collection (figs 89 & 90); in addition *The Boy by Proper Means Recovered* was photographed and reproduced when it was sold by Phillips in 1997. These are far from ideal sources: not only do we lack essential information regarding the palette used by Penny, but many of the more subtle details of the artist's original handling are lost in reproduction. These images do, nevertheless, suffice to provide a clear impression of the subject matter and formal structure of Penny's paintings, and it is these topics that will form the starting point for the following discussion.

In Penny's first painting, *A Boy Taken Out of the Water Drowned*, we are presented with two related groups of figures who are placed in a rural setting defined by a humble cottage, lush woodland and distant fields. The most prominent of these figure groups is placed in the foreground and consists of what appears to be a rustic family group. At its centre, we find a young milkmaid, shown fainting and falling backwards into the arms of an older companion. A milk pail, which she has just

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<sup>327</sup> The Witt Library's files suggest that Penny's paintings were in Argoutinsky's possession in the interwar period, though it is not clear when he first obtained the images or when they were sold on. The file also suggests that Penny's first image was sold by Christies, New York at an otherwise unidentified sale, when it was wrongly catalogued as Henry Walton's 'A Mishap'. The second painting was sold at Phillips, London on 21 January 1997, Lot 4, this time correctly attributed to Penny but misidentified as its companion piece, 'A Boy Taken Out of the Water Drowned'. No further information is available from the auctioneers.

dropped, lies upturned beside her, its contents spilling onto the ground. Meanwhile, a young girl – whom we can assume is the milkmaid's daughter – rushes up to her mother with an expression of acute concern. The source of their distress is not difficult to identify: gathered on the banks of a distant river, we see a further group of figures whose evident confusion suggests that they have been caught unawares by an alarming incident. Indeed, examining this part of the image in greater detail, it soon becomes apparent that the men and women who comprise this group are pulling the limp and lifeless body of a boy from the water. The tragic nature of the event is intimated by the dark sky above, and confirmed by the commotion that goes on around him. Whilst a woman is shown rushing frantically from the scene, her hands held aloft in a desperate plea for help, a man can be seen running anxiously towards the group. This terrible occurrence, we can assume, is the cause of the milkmaid's loss of consciousness; given the severity of her reaction, it seems probable that the victim may actually be her son.

Penny's second image, *The Boy by Proper Means Recovered*, features the same cast of characters in an almost identical rustic setting. Once again, the milkmaid and her companions occupy the foreground of the image, whilst the crowd, together with the drowned boy, appear in the background. This time, however, the circumstances in which these characters are depicted form a marked contrast with those of the preceding scene. Starting with the background group first, we find that the boy, though still somewhat bedraggled, has regained consciousness and is now being conducted by the crowd to the safety of the cottage. This miraculous reversal of fortune is echoed in the clouds, through which the sun now penetrates to illuminate the scene. The events, viewed with disbelief by the trio of female figures in the foreground, have prompted another outpouring of emotion. The older woman, her relief evident in her sanguine expression, points towards the unfolding scene; the small girl excitedly clenches her fists as she sees her brother restored to life; but it is the figure of the young mother who again responds most intensely. With her eyes turned rapturously heavenwards, she falls to her knees and clasps her hands together in a gesture of blissful gratitude.

This latest pair of exhibition works, then, presented a sequential narrative that not only detailed a young boy's drowning and subsequent rescue but also portrayed the differing reactions of his family to what Sedgwick's later engravings aptly described

as the boy's 'apparent dissolution' and 'returning animation'. In doing so, they marked a striking return to the paired and contrasted imagery that the artist had put to such effective use in his *The Virtuous Comforted* and *The Profligate Punished* of 1774. The resemblance between these works, moreover, is more than merely formal, for if Penny's earlier pairing can be seen to have functioned as a metaphorical 'sermon in paint', it seems that his latest works were quite literally this. As the original catalogue entry testifies, Penny's highly dramatic scenes were based on 'Dr Franklin's Sermon to the Humane Society'.<sup>328</sup> This sermon, which had been given on 28 March 1779 by the Anglican divine Thomas Francklin, was intended to promote and – through the publication and sale of the text – to raise money for the Humane Society for the Recovery of Persons Apparently Drowned.<sup>329</sup>

The Humane Society was one of the many philanthropic organisations that emerged from the intellectual ferment and reformist optimism that came to characterise British culture at this time.<sup>330</sup> Taking inspiration from an earlier Dutch society founded for the same purpose, the particular concern of the Humane Society was to encourage the use of effective resuscitation techniques – notably the systematic application of artificial respiration – to revive victims of drowning and other forms of asphyxiation.<sup>331</sup> In order to exemplify the benefits of this project, Francklin's sermon presented an idealised description of the apparent death by drowning of a young countryman and his subsequent successful resuscitation by a supporter of the Society.<sup>332</sup> As comparison of Francklin's sermon and Penny's pictures makes apparent, it was this narrative that provided the artist with the specific source for his pictures.

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<sup>328</sup> See item no. 190 in *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy, MDCCLXXX*, p. 10.

<sup>329</sup> Francklin's text, published in the same year as *A Sermon Preached at St George's Bloomsbury, on Sunday, March 28, for the Benefit of the Humane Society, Instituted for the Recovery of Persons Apparently Dead by Drowning*, was sold by a variety of London booksellers, including the long-established family-run stationer's famous for producing Richardson's *Pamela*, J. Rivington and Co.

<sup>330</sup> For a detailed account of the early Humane Society, see L. A. F. Davidson, 'Raising up Humanity: A Cultural History of Resuscitation and the Royal Humane Society of London, 1774-1808' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of York, 2001).

<sup>331</sup> See Davidson, 'Raising up Humanity', pp. 33-57. For a contemporary account, see also Humane Society, *Plan and Reports of the Society Instituted at London in the Year MDCCLXXIV for the Recovery of Persons Apparently Drowned* (London, 1775), esp. p. 8. As this publication highlights, one of the 'most efficacious' resuscitation techniques advocated by the Society was 'to blow with force into the lungs, by applying the mouth to that of the patient, closing his nostrils with one hand, and gently expelling the air again by pressing the chest with the other, imitating the strong breathing of a healthy person'.

<sup>332</sup> Francklin, *A Sermon Preached...for the Benefit of the Humane Society*, pp. 14-15.

Francklin begins by asking his audience to imagine that they are enjoying a peaceful evening walk beside a ‘delightful stream’. With little warning, he then explodes this idyllic vision by describing how the scene of ‘rural retirement’ is suddenly interrupted by a tragic accident. We are told that, only ‘a little distance’ away, ‘a busy bustling croud [sic] of industrious labourers’ is to be seen ‘encircling the body of their hapless companion, whom they have taken, at the hazard of their own lives, out of the neighbouring river’. The crowd is described taking the victim’s lifeless and swollen body back to his family, who upon seeing the ‘horrid spectacle’, immediately fall into confused despair. In Francklin’s words, ‘Fear, despondency, horror and astonishment are spread over every countenance’. Rendered incapable by desperation, they are unable to attempt the victim’s recovery and so ‘consign him to the grave’.<sup>333</sup>

Francklin’s description of the young man’s drowning and the subsequent despair of his companions and family finds an almost exact match in Penny’s heart-rending first scene. The trees, cottage and distant river that characterise Penny’s depicted landscape can be seen as a direct evocation of Francklin’s imagined rural idyll. The artist’s background vignette, centring as it does upon a chaotic mass of figures clustered around the lifeless form of the victim, accords closely with the preacher’s description of the brave but ignorant labourers who drag their compatriot’s body from the water before conducting it to his family ‘in a state of hopeless despondency’. The three females in the foreground bear a similarly close relationship to the imagery of Francklin’s text, their state of emotional extremity corresponding to the ‘fruitless tears and useless lamentation’ that overcomes the victim’s family. The collapsing milkmaid and her bewildered parent, in particular, recall Francklin’s description of the young man’s family ‘absorbed in grief, their limbs petrified with despair’. With the sermon in mind, moreover, we can now also recognise the figure shown running towards the scene as the benevolent supporter of the Humane Society who ‘flies, like the Good Samaritan’ to the aid of the victim.<sup>334</sup>

There are similarly close parallels between the remaining part of Francklin’s narrative and Penny’s second picture. In his sermon, Francklin immediately reverses the scenario, going on to describe how the supporter of the Humane Society, who has

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<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

now arrived at the scene, rapidly secures volunteers from among the ‘idle sons of curiosity’ and, with their help, begins to apply the ‘plain and simple means which reason dictates, as the most proper to reanimate, if possible, the lifeless mass’. After applying the resuscitation techniques with ‘ceaseless toil and unwearied assiduity’, nature at last ‘resumes her suspended powers’. This description clearly accords with the nature of the events depicted in Penny’s second background vignette, which shows the patient being carried by two men, his eyes now wide open. Even the blanket in which he is wrapped, although not specifically described by Francklin, can be seen as an aspect of Penny’s attempt to accurately delineate the recovery techniques advocated by the Society, which included placing the body of a drowning victim in ‘a bed or a blanket, properly warmed’.<sup>335</sup> The figure of the man mopping his brow, it would seem, can only be the victim’s saviour, exhausted by his prolonged exertions but relieved by their successful outcome. In the foreground, meanwhile, the transformed emotional state of the victim’s three family members can be seen to correspond to Francklin’s touching evocation of ‘the delightful scene of wonder and astonishment, of mutual joy, transport and felicity’ that follows the unforeseen recovery.<sup>336</sup>

The vivid descriptions given by Francklin were clearly calculated to play upon his audience’s emotions and, as such, to evoke sympathy for the Society’s aims. As Francklin himself put it, he hoped that, ‘even this faint idea and resemblance of such a scene will strike so forcibly on your mind as to expand them into chearful [sic] beneficence’.<sup>337</sup> In choosing to depict this particular storyline, Penny, we can therefore suggest, was actively translating the exemplary purposes of the sermon into painted form. Indeed, direct evidence of the artist’s desire to use his paintings in this way can be found in a contemporary communication from an anonymous ‘admirer’, presumably part of the artist’s immediate entourage, who wrote to the *Morning Chronicle* to observe that,

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<sup>335</sup> This process is recorded in an undated poster published by the Humane Society under the title *Society for the Recovery of Persons Apparently Drowned*. A unique copy with handwritten revisions, seemingly the only survivor of a set of ‘advertisements’ that the Society resolved at its General Meeting of 19 May 1774 to display in the streets that neighboured the Thames, can be found in the British Library (ESTC citation no. T223982).

<sup>336</sup> Francklin, *A Sermon Preached...for the Benefit of the Humane Society*, p. 15.

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

Mr Penny, who is justly celebrated in his profession as a painter for the propriety and morality of his designs, and the taste and judgement of the execution, may now be considered as a fellow labourer in the great work of preserving the human species. The eloquence of the preacher, the elegance of the writer, and the skill of the physician, have all been employed in supporting the Humane Society; but at the present exhibition at Somerset-house, the artist has resolved not to be an idle spectator of the great work of humanity: Mr Penny has therefore prepared two pictures for public exhibition, which, through the medium of the eye, cannot fail to raise an interest in the generous and expanded heart in favour of the recovery of the drowned.<sup>338</sup>

As these comments make clear, Penny, in taking up this prominent cause, was seeking to become the artistic equivalent of the preacher, expounding the benefits, like the Humane Society's own adherents, of humanitarian endeavour, but this time through the language of paint. Of course, Francklin's narrative could hardly have been better calculated to facilitate this. The idea of an innocent rustic and his family experiencing, from one moment to the next, a dramatic change in their fortunes, was one that naturally lent itself to the kind of contrasted painting for which Penny had come to be known. Francklin's sermon, in other words, provided the artist with a perfect opportunity to return to the self-consciously moralised and contrasted model of genre painting he had pioneered in *The Virtuous Comforted* and *The Profligate Punished*.

Seen in this light, it is surely significant that Francklin's sermon seems to have been intended from the outset to furnish a subject suitable for this kind of pictorial representation. Before presenting his narrative, the preacher openly laments the inadequacy of his own powers to do it justice and the need for a greater artist to take it up: 'O, for the eloquence of a Demosthenes to describe, or the pencil of a Raphael to delineate it!'<sup>339</sup> Francklin's implicit plea for a visual representation of his narrative is then made explicit in an accompanying footnote. After stating that his 'little imperfect narrative' might 'furnish matter to some of our eminent artists for an excellent picture', he goes on to recommend it 'to my friends, Sir Joshua Reynolds,

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<sup>338</sup> *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 20 May 1780.

<sup>339</sup> Francklin, *A Sermon Preached...for the Benefit of the Humane Society*, p. 13.

Mr West, or that ingenious moral painter Mr Penny, to try their skill upon it'.<sup>340</sup> The flattering implications of this request, which not only placed Penny in the company of the two most celebrated artists of the time but also explicitly described him as the 'ingenious moral painter', are highly suggestive, and imply that the artist and his work were well known either to Francklin himself or to the Humane Society's leaders.

Further scrutiny appears to support the idea that Francklin's request to Penny may have been the result of a pre-existing connection between the artist and the Society's leading members. In an important essay, Francis Lobo has shown that many projects for reform and improvement in late eighteenth-century Britain developed within tight-knit circles of physicians and 'philanthropists', most of whom came from Dissenting backgrounds.<sup>341</sup> The Humane Society was no exception. The Society's founder and main motive force was Thomas Cogan, a British physician of Unitarian convictions who had come across the Dutch approach to resuscitation while working in the Netherlands, first as a junior minister in the English church at the Hague, then as a student of medicine, and finally as a doctor.<sup>342</sup> After his return to England, he translated the memoirs of the earlier Dutch society for the recovery of drowned persons and published them in 1773.<sup>343</sup> The same ideas were also independently taken up by another influential London medical man, the apothecary Dr William Hawes. Hawes was also a well-known Dissenter, this time an Elder in the Presbyterian Church of St. Thomas, Southwark.<sup>344</sup> Encouraged by publications such as Cogan's, Hawes offered financial incentives of two guineas to those who attempted to resuscitate the victims of drowning and four guineas to those who did so successfully.<sup>345</sup> By this means, he hoped both to encourage the spread of the practice of resuscitation and – by requiring claimants to notify him rapidly of their attempts – to secure valuable evidence of its effectiveness.

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<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13 and fn.

<sup>341</sup> Francis M. Lobo, 'Haygarth, Smallpox and Dissent', in A. Cunningham and R. French (eds), *The Medical Enlightenment of the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 217-53.

<sup>342</sup> See Carolyn D. Williams's ODNB entry on Cogan.

<sup>343</sup> See Thomas Cogan, *Memoirs of the Society Instituted at Amsterdam in Favour of Drowned Persons; For the Years 1767, 1768, 1769, 1771* (London, 1773).

<sup>344</sup> See Carolyn D. Williams's ODNB entry on Hawes.

<sup>345</sup> See Humane Society, undated poster entitled *Society for the Recovery of Persons Apparently Drowned*.

Such was the success of Hawes's scheme that Cogan soon warned him that the costs were becoming excessive, and in 1774 the two decided to unite their efforts by founding a public charity to help underwrite the expense of paying the premiums. Cogan and Hawes each solicited the support of fifteen friends, of whom the most prominent was Dr John Coakley Lettsom, yet another celebrated London physician and philanthropist of Dissenting – in this instance Quaker – stock.<sup>346</sup> All three already knew each other well, and Lettsom, moreover, had been trained in Edinburgh by one of the pioneering figures of modern medical education, Dr John Cullen. Through Cullen, the Dissenting circle was connected to Cullen's pupil, Dr John Haygarth, who had been Physician to the Chester Infirmary since 1766. Although himself an Anglican, Haygarth was in close correspondence with the Dissenting philanthropists, as well as a notable proponent of their reforming schemes. He introduced the techniques of the Humane Society to Chester in 1776 and later became famous for his project to eliminate smallpox through inoculation.<sup>347</sup> The Cheshire connection was further strengthened through Lettsom's patron, another celebrated Quaker physician, Dr John Fothergill, who not only rented a country house, Lea Hall, about twenty miles from Chester but who also retained close links with the county through his mother, who came from a substantial Cheshire-based Quaker family.<sup>348</sup> This group, therefore, constituted a close-knit network that was underpinned by personal and geographical, as well as religious and professional, links.

There are reasons to think that such connections may also have underlain the invitation to Penny to take up the Society's cause. Penny himself, it should be remembered, was from Cheshire, and his nephew, George Buckley Bower, would later become a prominent clergyman within the Diocese of Chester.<sup>349</sup> In addition, both his father and brother practised as surgeons, suggesting that the artist may have

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<sup>346</sup> See Davidson, 'Raising up Humanity', p. ix. On Lettsom, see the ODNB entry by J. F. Payne (rev. Roy Porter).

<sup>347</sup> For Lettsom's and Cullen's connections, see the ODNB entries cited above. On Haygarth's schemes of improvement in Chester, see Lobo, 'Haygarth, Smallpox and Dissent', p. 222. For further details about Haygarth's career, see his ODNB entry by Simon Harrison.

<sup>348</sup> Lobo, 'Haygarth, Smallpox and Dissent', p. 226. See also Margaret DeLacy's ODNB entry on Fothergill.

<sup>349</sup> Buckley Bower (d. 1801) eventually inherited Penny's Academy lectures, as detailed in the artist's will, proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury on 22 November 1791, National Archives Prob. 11/1211/172. For Bower's ecclesiastical position, see Joyce M. Horn, David M. Smith and Patrick Mussett, *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1541-1857* (12 vols) (London, 1969-2007), vol. 11 (Carlisle, Chester, Durham, Manchester, Ripon and Sodor and Man dioceses), pp. 47-49.

had a natural affinity for medical circles as well as enjoying some degree of acquaintance with the Chester infirmary and its celebrated physician, Haygarth.<sup>350</sup> It is also notable that Henry Angelo, writing several decades later in his illuminating *Reminiscences* from 1828, recalled that Penny habitually wore ‘his Quaker-coloured suit’, just as he can be seen to have done in Zoffany’s portrait of *The Academicians of the Royal Academy* from 1771-72.<sup>351</sup> Plain, light coloured – usually greyish – clothing was characteristically worn by Quakers such as Lettsom and Fothergill, and such evidence suggests that Penny was self-consciously sympathetic to the values of the Dissenting reformers.<sup>352</sup>

Although circumstantial, this evidence cumulatively implies that Francklin’s seemingly rhetorical invitation to Penny is more likely to have been the result of some kind of prior arrangement rather than a spontaneous solicitation. It is, moreover, not difficult to see how such an arrangement could have functioned as a morally laudable and mutually beneficial *quid pro quo*. The Society’s Dissenting leaders would gain further publicity for their philanthropic cause from a most respectable figure, the Academy’s Professor of Painting. Penny, on the other hand, was furnished with a subject eminently suited to his increasingly moralised practice—and just in time for the Academy’s first exhibition at its imposing new home. By means of this exchange, not only was the Humane Society able to further its agenda through Penny’s support, but Penny was able to align himself with the reforming ambitions of one of London’s most prominent – as well as fashionable – philanthropic institutions, as the Society’s growing success in attracting the patronage of figures like David Garrick, Sir John Pringle (President of the Royal Society), and Jonas Hanway (Founder of the Marine Society and a central figure in philanthropic circles) confirmed.<sup>353</sup> This all suggests that Penny’s decision to paint *A Boy Taken Out of the Water Drowned* and *The Boy by Proper Means Recovered* was something more than a straightforward translation of the Humane Society’s purposes

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<sup>350</sup> For the professions of Penny’s father and brother, see Crisp (ed.), *Visitation of England and Wales*, Notes, vol. 11, pp. 135-40.

<sup>351</sup> Henry Angelo, *Reminiscences*, p. 120.

<sup>352</sup> The only detailed study of Quaker dress is Amelia Gummere, *The Quaker: A Study in Costume* (Philadelphia, 1901). Good examples of the kind of self-consciously plain clothing worn by Quaker men can be found in Gilbert Stuart’s 1781 portrait of Fothergill, now housed at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, USA and in the portrait of Lettsom that appears in Robert Smirke’s *Recovery of a Young Man Believed Drowned after Resuscitation by Dr Hawes* from 1783, discussed below.

<sup>353</sup> See Davidson, ‘Raising up Humanity’, p. 83.

into paint; it was also a carefully crafted opportunity to reaffirm and consolidate his newly-acknowledged position as the ‘ingenious moral painter’.

Close analysis of his latest exhibits shows that Penny exploited this opportunity to the full, creating images that served to articulate a moral and social message closely aligned with the purposes of the Humane Society, but in ways carefully calculated to maximise their impact in the exhibition arena. This begins with the evocative rural setting in which the artist’s depicted narrative takes place. Although some of the finer detail is difficult to make out in the surviving photographs, it is nevertheless clear from Sedgwick’s engravings that Penny sought to evoke an archetypal English landscape scene. In both images, the victim’s family is shown standing in front of a quaint cottage with a neatly thatched roof. The cottage, which, as we see from Penny’s second image, is framed by bushes and a stack of chopped wood, evoking the cosy hearth inside, appears, in turn, to be nestled within a verdant copse of trees. Further emphasising the picturesque character of each scene, this area of lush woodland opens, in the foreground, onto a broad clearing whilst providing the frame for a wide river which skirts the distant fields in the background. It is also notable that, in Penny’s first image, a second cluster of cottages and a small village church can be glimpsed straddling the opposite bank of the river. Again, these details add to the distinctly bucolic character of the scenes depicted.

As John Barrell has shown, such seemingly tranquil landscape imagery had an ideological charge in the eighteenth century that is difficult to appreciate at a distance of more than two hundred years.<sup>354</sup> Drawing inspiration from historians of the agricultural revolution, he notes that at this time the practice of agriculture was being transformed by the concern of the landowning classes to secure their prosperity through agricultural ‘improvement’. Such improvement – undertaken by means of enclosure and the introduction of new technologies like the seed drill – gave the social elites a practical familiarity with the mechanics of agriculture. This, in its turn, led to a distinctive change in artistic representations of country life from a romanticised ‘pastoral’ ideal to a more realistic ‘georgic’ vision. Whereas the pastoral ethos stressed the aristocratic value of *otium*, epitomised in imagery showing the leisured swain idly watching his cattle, the georgic stressed the

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<sup>354</sup> See John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting, 1730-1840* (Cambridge and New York, 1980), pp. 1-33.

countryside as a place of labour and industry, where the fruits of nature could be harvested only through the application of toil and hard work.<sup>355</sup> This transition to a Georgic vision of rural life is readily apparent in such imagery as Elias Martin's stipple engraving of a rural family (fig. 91) from 1778. Here we see a scrawny and shabbily dressed labourer with his scythe over one arm and his hands held out towards his wife and children, who are shown, in turn, sitting snugly together in front of their thatched cottage. The image clearly promotes the idea that the labourer's toil is justified by the security and prosperity it brings to his family, and this message is made explicit in the lines from the libretto to Arne's opera, *Alfred*, which form the title to the plate: 'These hands can toil: Can Sow the ground and Reap for thee and thy Sweet babes'. It is with images of this kind, as Barrell has argued, that late eighteenth-century visual culture both recognised and naturalised the labour of the rural working class.<sup>356</sup>

There is little doubt that such implications are discernible in Francklin's original sermon, with its explicit reference to a 'croud of industrious labourers'. It is also clear that this vision of the industrious labouring poor was intrinsic to the moral message that was being promoted by the Humane Society in order to justify its activities. As the literature of the Society shows, its purposes were unambiguously framed in social and economic, as well as in humanitarian, terms. For instance, in the Society's *Plan and Reports* from 1775, it was observed that the original Dutch model for the society was intended to remedy accidents that occurred 'principally among the most laborious and deserving part of the community'.<sup>357</sup> The publication went on to identify as a particular focus for its efforts those members of 'the *industrious poor*' whose labours exposed them to the risk of drowning and which, as a consequence, imposed 'a kind of demand upon us, to interpose, and avert if possible, the fatal consequences to which they are continually rendered liable, by serving the community with their labours, and gaining an honest livelihood'.<sup>358</sup> Indeed, the *Report* asked, 'is it not our *interest*, as well as duty, to replace them, if

<sup>355</sup> Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape*, pp. 7-14.

<sup>356</sup> See Barrell's discussion of Gainsborough in *The Dark Side of the Landscape*, pp. 35-88, and especially his discussion of the representation of labour in eighteenth-century British culture on pp. 38-40.

<sup>357</sup> Humane Society, *Plan and Reports*, p. 4. Francis Lobo has shown how important such arguments were for other major projects that originated from the 'Dissenting intellectual network'. See his 'Haygarth, Smallpox and Dissent', pp. 217-53.

<sup>358</sup> Humane Society, *Plan and Reports*, pp. 45-46.

possible, in their sphere of usefulness, that they may again work for their wives and families; whereby these may be snatched from immediate misery and want, and the community be relieved from an expensive burden?’<sup>359</sup> The activities of the Society therefore took their part within the complex web of mutual duties and responsibilities, interests and obligations that were held, at least by those who benefited from them most directly, to underpin the effective functioning of England’s agrarian and mercantile economies.

The clearest evidence that Penny’s imagery of rural life embodies such values is perhaps to be found in the simple but neat dress of the protagonists, particularly the main family group in the foreground. With her plain dress, rolled-up sleeves, and overturned pail suggesting that she was in the midst of carrying her milk back to the family home at the time of her son’s accident, the milkmaid must clearly be identified as a hardworking, and therefore morally laudable, figure. Moreover, we see signifiers of modest but real prosperity in the ring of flowers – probably silk – that adorns the old woman’s elegant bergère hat, as well as in the generous lengths of ribbon that finish both the milkmaid’s fallen hat and the young girl’s mob cap. The implication is clear: that the fruits of the family’s labours are sufficiently generous to afford not only the necessities of life but also some of the small luxuries brought by late eighteenth-century England’s burgeoning consumer economy. Penny’s rural scenes must, in this respect, be seen to belong to the Georgic tradition identified by Barrell and thus to the vision of moral economy articulated in the Humane Society’s publications.

At the same time, however, it would appear that Penny’s evocation of rural life was intended to tap into the proclivities of contemporary exhibition audiences. His decision to place a milkmaid at the centre of his image, for example, has no direct precedent in Francklin’s sermon, but clearly capitalises on this figure’s enduring appeal. The milkmaid was a long-established archetype of rural life, the epitome of hard-working rustic beauty and healthy sexuality. Her attractions, furthermore, were a recurrent theme in early modern British culture, forming the subject of numerous popular ballads and bawdy caricatures published in the period. In the anonymous late seventeenth-century ballad *The Bonny Milk-Maid*, for example, the healthy bloom of

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<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

the hardworking country girl is vividly contrasted with the pallor of her idle urban equivalent:

Oh how the Town Lass  
 Looks with her white face,  
 And her lips of deadly pale,  
 But it is not so  
 With those that go  
 Thro' frost and Snow,  
 With cheeks that glow,  
 To carry the Milking Pail.<sup>360</sup>

As the verse makes clear, it is the resilient and conscientious milkmaid who, habitually braving the elements to fill her milking pail, enjoys 'cheeks that glow'. The milkmaid's attractions were similarly celebrated in higher status productions such as Robert Sayer's and John Bennett's mezzotint *Pure Nature* (fig. 92) from 1779, which shows a country gentleman attempting to seduce a bashful young milkmaid until disrupted by her watchful mother. Playing on the popular conception of the milkmaid as a comely maiden, the image is replete with sexual references: the gentleman clasps the milkmaid's hands and points to a pair of courting doves; his dog clammers up on his knee and points with his nose to the milkmaid as if marking out his prey; a cockerel, meanwhile, according to the verses inscribed on the plate, 'inspired with sympathetic flame/Jocund salutes his willing feather'd dame'.

While Penny's paintings carefully avoid the more risqué implications of Sayer's and Bennett's print, there can be little doubt that these images sought to capitalise on the popular appeal of the milkmaid. The artist's protagonist is clearly intended to be a familiar but highly attractive country maiden. Her strong but well-turned forearms and shapely physique signal her status as a healthy and robust young woman. At the same time, the dark hair escaping suggestively from the confines of her cap, her smooth and unmarked complexion, her retroussé nose and delicately inflected cheek, are clearly intended to make a fetching contrast with the faded features of her older companion. In all these respects, then, Penny's character conforms to the popular

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<sup>360</sup> Anon., *The Bonny Milk-Maid* (London, c.1683-1703), lines 32-45.

image of the healthy and fair-faced milkmaid, ensuring that a figure which encapsulated the benefits of rural life was at the centre of the artist's works.

This unabashed emphasis on rurality, it should be remembered, related Penny's latest works to an increasingly popular and fashionable strand of exhibition imagery. Rural subjects had an enduring appeal for English audiences, as the immense popularity of artists such as George Smith of Chichester, who specialised in producing drawings and engravings of typically English landscapes, clearly shows. However, a series of rural subject paintings exhibited in the years immediately preceding Penny's latest works had received especial critical acclaim. For example, Gainsborough's *Cottage Door with Children Playing* (fig. 93) from 1778, was seemingly the first of its type to be shown at the Academy, and was highly praised by critics for its 'correct and masterly [disposition]', its 'warmth and beauty of colouring', and the feelings of 'ineffable delight' it inspired in viewers.<sup>361</sup> These 'cottage door' scenes subsequently became a peculiarly characteristic aspect of the artist's output, and their influence can be felt in Penny's latest images. Although difficult to make out in the black-and-white photographs, Sedgwick's engravings show that the family's cottage occupies a prominent place in both *A Boy Taken Out of the Water Drowned* and *The Boy by Proper Means Recovered*, where it frames the foreground figure group.

The resemblance between the two artists' works is, however, offset by equally obvious differences in treatment, with Gainsborough's light and flickering touch contrasting with Penny's tighter, firmer handling. In this respect, Penny's images can be compared more closely with another recent painting of a rural scene, this time by George Stubbs. Stubbs's *Labourers* (fig. 94) from 1779 depicted a group of rural workers loading bricks onto a horse-drawn cart in view of Lord Torrington's recently-built lodge at Southill. With its unusually vivid and unromanticised portrayal of these characters, this work introduced a still more innovative approach to rural subject matter than Gainsborough's more idealised works and appears to have attracted a similar degree of critical acclaim. In fact, this painting, strongly recalling the 'low' rural scenes of Teniers, became the 'favourite subject of the year', prompting Josiah Wedgwood to replicate the scene in enamel.<sup>362</sup> The verisimilitude

<sup>361</sup> *General Advertiser and Morning Intelligencer*, 30 April 1778.

<sup>362</sup> See Judy Egerton, *George Stubbs, Painter – Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven and London, 2007), p. 418.

of Stubbs's highly successful work, as well as its overt Georgic emphasis, resonates closely with Penny's later images. It therefore seems clear that Penny's Arcadian landscapes peopled by hardworking peasants not only articulated the distinctive social and economic values of the eighteenth-century elite, but conformed to a strand of exhibition imagery that enjoyed ever-increasing critical and popular appeal. Once again, Penny's images reflect a desire to promote a distinctively moralising agenda while conforming to the latest artistic fashions.

Penny's dual concern with promoting the moral message of the Humane Society while enhancing the impact of his works in the Academy exhibition room comes out still more clearly in other aspects of his treatment. Indeed, it seems that such concerns led the artist to actively modify certain aspects of Francklin's original sermon in order to increase the narrative and formal potency of his images. For example, in Penny's first painting, it is clear that the drowning victim is a boy or at most a youth, as the picture's title confirms. In Francklin's sermon, however, this character is unambiguously described as an adult labourer, the husband of a young woman, the father of several children, and the son of another woman for whom he acts as a 'prop and support'. The most obvious explanation for this change is that Penny wished to capitalise upon his viewers' capacity to engage sympathetically with the intense bonds of affection that unite mother and child. Once again, this interpretation can be supported by direct parallels in the Humane Society's early publications:

And when it [the Society] shall become extensive, numbers will no doubt have cause to rejoice, that while they have been instrumental in saving *others*, their own, or the lives of their dearest relations, perhaps of their children, whose heedless and adventurous spirits are exposing them to perpetual dangers, have by these means been protracted for years. How many a parent is hourly subject to the danger of seeing a sprightly, thoughtless son brought home a breathless corpse! What would they not give at that instant for the most distant hopes of recovery!<sup>363</sup>

Although this particular passage clearly focuses on the potential that the Society's activities had to save its supporters' *own* children, it goes on to emphasise the

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<sup>363</sup> Humane Society, *Plan and Reports*, pp. 46-47.

peculiar emotional satisfaction that resulted from saving the lives of others' close relations, which went far beyond rational social and economic calculation:

If there be, to every good man, a secret pleasure in performing acts of common beneficence, in being of *cold* utility to his fellow-creatures, how must his heart *glow* with satisfaction, where he has been instrumental in restoring to the joyful arms of relatives and friends, a parent, a child, a brother or an intimate, at the moment they are deploring his loss with inexpressible anguish!<sup>364</sup>

Penny's substitution of a son for a husband, then, was intended to play upon the powerful emotional implications of a child's loss or preservation and so avoid too close a focus on utilitarian motivations. Not only did this enable the artist to communicate in the clearest possible terms the benevolent concerns that underpinned the Humane Society's reforming project but also to enhance the affective power of his exhibits.

Similar concerns with increasing the moral import and aesthetic impact of his works can be seen in a further significant difference between Penny's treatment and Francklin's original sermon. In Francklin's sermon, the drowned youth is returned to the family cottage where his apparent loss and subsequent resuscitation take place in the midst of his family. In Penny's paintings, by contrast, the drama of the drowning, resuscitation and recovery takes place at some distance from the family group and their home. This has the effect of breaking down each stage of the narrative into two components, one centred upon the drowned boy and the other upon the emotional response of the milkmaid and her companions. The relatively self-contained character of the two figure groups is further emphasised, moreover, by the disparity in scale between them and also by Penny's use of chiaroscuro. Whilst the group in the foreground is magnified in scale and defined by strongly contrasted areas of light and shade, the background figures form a small-scale vignette that is uniformly bathed in light, once again creating two distinct pictorial and narrative zones. The result is that, after gaining an initial impression of each image, our eyes track across the canvas to absorb the background detail but then return to settle on the foreground group. Penny has thus completely transformed the emphasis of Francklin's original

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<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

sermon, making the victim's family, rather than the drowned boy himself, the formal and psychological centre of his images.

The distinctiveness of this narrative and compositional strategy emerges even more clearly if we place Penny's exhibition pairing against another set of images that depict closely related subject matter. Only a few years after Penny exhibited his pictures, Robert Smirke recapitulated what appears to have been essentially the same narrative episode in a pair of paintings entitled *Young Man Lifted from the River, Apparently Drowned* and *Recovery of a Young Man Believed Drowned after Resuscitation by Dr Hawes* (figs 95 & 96).<sup>365</sup> Apparently drawing on John Singleton Copley's celebrated history painting *Watson and the Shark* from 1778 for its basic composition, Smirke's first painting is dominated by a group of rescuers, who are using a punt to bring in the body of a drowned young man from the water. Whilst the victim's grizzled father stands ready to receive him at the water's edge, his elderly mother, accompanied by two obviously distressed girls, is shown fainting into the arms of another young man. Standing in close formal relationship with each other, these figures collectively form a sweeping U-shape that extends from one side of the image to the other. The result is a highly coherent composition that unambiguously prioritises the young man's drowning, in line with Francklin's original narrative.

A similar compositional strategy is deployed in Smirke's companion piece. In this image, we are transported to the interior of the family cottage, where we see the same character immediately after his revival, surrounded by his astonished and grateful family. This time, however, they are accompanied by the Society's leading officers, Hawes and Lettsom, who are respectively shown raising the young man from his bed and exhibiting his miraculous transformation to his mother and sisters. As in Smirke's first painting, the principal figures are again arranged in a continuous arc that sweeps across the picture plane, creating a similarly coherent composition. This strong formal structure has the further advantage of enabling the artist to both emphasise the unfolding drama and add further detail to the picture's periphery without compromising the unity of the whole. In the foreground, for example, we see the various accoutrements necessary for the implementation of the Society's

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<sup>365</sup> The inscriptions on Robert Pollard's later engravings of Smirke's two paintings make no explicit mention of a literary source. However, their similarities to Penny's pair of pictures and Francklin's sermon suggest that they derive from the same source.

resuscitation techniques: a blanket and warming pan, two bottles of strong liquor, and vials of smelling salts, used to stimulate the reviving body. With the help of such incidental elements, Smirke's composition is able to provide a literal and highly legible representation of the original textual source, while giving a pivotal role to the Humane Society's representatives and their methods.

It is not difficult to imagine how Penny could have used a similar composition, based on a single coherent group of similarly scaled figures, to provide a more conventional, and faithful, representation of Francklin's narrative. As we have seen, many of Penny's earlier historical and genre paintings – including his *The Virtuous Comforted* and *The Profligate Punished* and *Jane Shore Led to Do Penance at St. Paul's* – conform to this model. Even more notably, the artist's most famous composition, *The Death of General Wolfe*, made use of this kind of unified composition by showing its dying subject at the centre of a larger figure group. The same basic model could easily have been adapted for *The Boy by Proper Means Recovered*. The drowned boy would have provided the focus in place of Wolfe, with his family members and rescuers grouped around him in their cottage, precisely as they are described in Francklin's sermon and depicted in Smirke's later work. This kind of compositional approach, moreover, was legitimated by the most prestigious precedents, having been employed by Nicolas Poussin in his renowned historical work *The Death of Germanicus* from 1626-28 and, more recently, by Benjamin West in his recent homage to this painting, *Eristratus, the Physician, Discovers the Love of Antiochus for Stratoniche* from 1772. The ready accessibility of these models makes their avoidance by Penny even more striking. Why, then, did the artist choose to make use of this seemingly unorthodox composition? How did he go about developing it? And why did he develop it at this time in particular?

In order to answer these questions it is important to consider carefully the implications of Penny's highly distinctive approach. The reworking of Francklin's narrative and the associated prioritisation of the foreground figure group had a number of obvious effects. At the most basic level, it allowed Penny to make full use of the picture space to increase the narrative richness of his images. As such, the artist's latest submission bears comparison with a variety of works that make use of a related narrative approach. Penny's own *The Death of General Wolfe*, for example, showed a vignette of the siege of Quebec in the background and even included a

runner – a soldier breaking from the lines to join the group around the dying general – in a manner that anticipates aspects of his later works. In *A Boy Taken Out of the Water Drowned* and *The Boy by Proper Means Recovered*, however, the effect is far more emphatic. Indeed, it is perhaps unsurprising that one contemporary critic reacted to them with puzzlement, writing that although they were among the most expressive pictures in the exhibition, ‘in many other respects, they are very deficient; the figures in the foreground appearing gigantic, from the excessive contrast between them and those in the distance, and the whole wanting force’.<sup>366</sup>

Strikingly, a rather closer parallel to Penny’s approach can be found in two almost exactly contemporaneous portraits by Benjamin West (figs 97 & 98). As their titles imply, West’s *Portrait of His Majesty, Two General Officers on Horseback, and the Royal Navy in the Background* and *Portrait of Her Majesty, and the Royal Family in the Background* also combine a monumental foreground with an almost miniaturistic background. In the first work, the King, resplendent in full military uniform and wearing the Garter star and sash, forms the centrepiece of a self-contained assemblage of similarly scaled and brilliantly coloured foreground elements—curtain, table, crown and sceptre, and Turkey carpet. We are then presented with a minutely rendered background scene which shows a group of mounted officers and foot soldiers patrolling the coastline in front of a military encampment and the assembled fleet. In a similar manner, this painting’s pendant is centred upon the elegantly-dressed figure of the Queen, who is framed by rich draperies, furnishings and lofty architecture, while an aperture in the wall behind reveals another small-scale figure group, this time consisting of the King and Queen’s children on a grassy terrace with Windsor Castle in the distance. In both these portraits, it would seem, West was using background vignettes to provide a rich implicit narrative that communicated his sitters’ role and identity without detracting from their pictorial primacy.

Given the artistic environment initiated by the move to Somerset House, we can begin to suggest why Penny might have sought such an effect in his two paintings. By encouraging his viewers to focus primarily on the foreground figure group while ensuring that the underlying narrative remained visible in the background, Penny

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<sup>366</sup> *The Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 22 May 1780.

was able to radically simplify a potentially complex multi-figural composition. Such a manoeuvre can be seen to possess a clear rationale in the context of the Academy's new Great Room, with its grandiose proportions and crowded walls. Against this backdrop, a relatively simple image with a small number of large-scale figures would be more immediately noticeable and legible than a work packed with moderately scaled characters. This is especially the case given the prominence of grandiose full-length portraits such as those by Reynolds and West. It seems likely that Penny's bold and apparently simple compositions were planned, at least in part, with an awareness that they would have to hold their own against such magniloquent works. In this sense, we can see Penny's avoidance of a more conventional unified composition as a deliberate strategy to enhance the visual impact of his images relative to their physical size.

No less significant, however, are the semantic implications of this compositional strategy. By focusing on the three females who occupy the critical foreground space, Penny was inviting the viewer to engage wholeheartedly with their feelings of acute distress. Indeed, the powerfully affecting emotional response of these characters, particularly the figure of the victim's mother, arguably constitutes the primary theme of this pair of images. The emphasis on emotion is reinforced by the treatment of the milkmaid's fainting fit, which has remarkable affinities with Joseph Highmore's portrayal of *Pamela Fainting* (fig. 99), produced in the 1740s as part of a series of paintings illustrating Richardson's eponymous novel. Highmore's portrayal of Pamela closely resembles Penny's figure of the swooning milkmaid, with both characters shown with their eyes closed, their heads tipped back spiritlessly and their arms dangling weakly. These parallels also embrace the second figure in Highmore's work, Pamela's companion and her master's housekeeper, Mrs Jervis. Jervis is pictured behind Pamela's bed with her hands tightly clasped in a gesture of acute shock, and assumes an almost identical pose to that of the milkmaid in Penny's second painting. By drawing on Highmore's work in this way, Penny was making a pictorial gesture that would have been readily comprehensible to contemporaries. Highmore's compositions, it should be remembered, were conceived not as illustrations to be bound within the text, but as an independent venture specifically

designed to capitalise on the burgeoning print market.<sup>367</sup> With ample explanations engraved in their margins, these engravings functioned as a self-contained re-telling of the story that was readily accessible to an even wider audience than that of the original book. As such, they became perhaps the most popular and iconic pictorial exemplar of the culture of sensibility. The affinities between *A Boy Taken Out of the Water Drowned* and *The Boy by Proper Means Recovered* and Highmore's illustrations clearly locate Penny's images within the broader culture of sensibility in which Richardson's novel had such an important status.<sup>368</sup>

The focus on a vulnerable and distressed female subject of the kind exemplified by *Pamela* is reinforced by Penny's adoption of a split composition, which strongly emphasises the milkmaid in both images. As we have already seen in our discussion of *The Virtuous Comforted*, such a move had very distinctive implications. The prioritisation of feminine suffering reflects contemporary convictions that female subjects were especially sensitive to sympathetic emotion, and this belief is evident in further aspects of Penny's treatment. For example, the intimacy of the milkmaid's sympathetic connection to her son is emphasised by the close resemblance between their poses as well as by their common loss of consciousness. Their limply hanging arms, their slumped heads, and the way that they are supported by their companions, all echo each other precisely, creating a pattern of close formal equivalences. This pattern can be traced forward into the second image, where these characters' mirrored poses further emphasise the interconnectedness of their physical and psychological states. Now, however, they are facing towards each other. This metaphorically reunites them while introducing a measure of calming symmetry into the composition, bringing the high drama of the first image to some degree of resolution. Penny's bifurcated compositions, then, do more than simply encourage the viewer to focus on the emotional state of the foreground figure group. In each image, a complex series of formal equivalences and oppositions between the

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<sup>367</sup> The prints by Antoine Benoist and Louis Truchy were published on 1 July 1745. See Elizabeth Einberg, *Manners and Morals: Hogarth and British Painting 1700-1760*, exh. cat. (London, Tate Gallery, 1987), pp. 156-57.

<sup>368</sup> Richardson's *Pamela* was one of the most popular literary works of the time, reaching five editions in its first year of publication (1740) and selling a staggering 20,000 copies by the end of 1741. A deluxe octavo edition, boasting a series of twenty-nine finely engraved illustrations by Hayman, appeared only a year later in 1742. See Thomas Keymer and Peter Sabor, '*Pamela*' in *The Marketplace: Literary Controversy in Print Culture in Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge, 2009), p. 20.

foreground and background creates a highly legible relationship of cause and effect or action and reaction between the two figure groups. The result is a powerful pattern of visual and psychological exchange that simultaneously reinforces and bridges the compositional divide between foreground and background, creating a striking visual metaphor for the bonds of sympathy that both depend on, and overcome, the individual identities of mother and son.

For Penny, as for many of his contemporaries, the putatively innate female capacity for sympathetic response depicted in his images was possessed of moral power. In the wake of Adam Smith, George Cheyne and David Hume, sympathy was regarded as the natural foundation of moral conduct. In addition, it was believed that female suffering had an especially potent effect on the male spectator, eliciting a degree of masculine sympathetic response that would otherwise have remained dormant.<sup>369</sup>

The consequence is that Penny's images must be seen as a very particular reinterpretation of Francklin's sermon. Not only do they represent directly the sympathetic bond between mother and son, which becomes the dramatic centre of the images, but in doing so they enlist the power of feminine emotional sensitivity to engage the viewer's own sympathy. Penny's latest works must, in this light, be seen as possessing an additional layer of moral significance that relates them closely to his earlier depictions of *The Virtuous Comforted* and *The Profligate Punished*.

The moral seriousness of Penny's images is further reinforced by an additional stratum of pictorial reference, which extends beyond the contemporary cultivation of sensibility to embrace a further, and more overtly elevated, sphere of imagery. The attitude of the drowned boy in the first of Penny's images is clearly derived from Raphael's depiction of Christ in his *The Entombment* of 1507 (fig. 100). In both cases, the lifeless bodies, their hips sagging and legs dangling, assume almost identical poses as they are carried forward towards the viewer. Nor is this the only formal parallel between the two works. The background of Raphael's painting shows the Virgin Mary collapsing in a swoon, a motif known as the *spasimo della Vergine*.<sup>370</sup> His depiction of the *spasimo* shows the unconscious Virgin being

<sup>369</sup> For Cheyne and Hume, see Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*, pp. 6-15, 23-28. Sympathy had a central role in Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (London, 1759).

<sup>370</sup> According to Nicholas Penny, this particular motif had been employed in depictions of Christ's crucifixion as far back as the later Middle Ages. See Nicholas Penny, *National Gallery Catalogues: The Sixteenth Century Italian Paintings* (2 vols) (London, 2004), vol. 1, pp. 25-28.

supported by her companions, her head tipped backwards and arm falling to her side, a pose that Penny almost exactly replicated for the protagonist in his later image. The parallel between Penny's figure of the fainting mother and Raphael's swooning Madonna is, of course, especially apt given the mother and son relationship advanced by both these images. Penny, it would therefore seem, had taken Raphael's image and reconfigured it, inverting and exaggerating the relationship between foreground and background so as to retain the formal and narrative components of his model while transforming it into a contemporary genre painting. The resulting allusion would have been instantly recognisable to contemporaries, since Raphael's great work was amongst the most celebrated of all Old Master paintings. Penny's visual quotation has a further effect. Bringing to mind Francklin's call, 'Oh, for the pencil of a Raphael to delineate it!', it must also have been intended to suggest that Penny himself was a legitimate modern successor to the venerable artistic tradition that looked to Raphael as its consummate representative.

The storyline of Penny's second painting is similarly reinforced by allusions to traditional – and in this case distinctly Catholic baroque – imagery. As in the first scene, the representation of the milkmaid's transformed state can be seen to derive from a religious source. We need only look to such images as Guercino's *Santa Margherita da Cortona* (fig. 101) from 1648, which also portrays a rapturous praying woman, to see the close resemblance between Penny's protagonist and this figure's attitude and pose. Representing the ecstatic state that results from direct communion with the Holy Spirit, Guercino's protagonist is also shown kneeling on the ground, with her hands tightly clasped, her head tilted backwards, and her eyes turned heavenwards, closely foreshadowing Penny's later image. Moreover, the light of the Spirit can be seen bursting from the clouds above her and, in a similar manner in Penny's image, the sun breaks through the parted clouds to illuminate the revived boy. Such similarities suggest that Penny wished to convey a comparable state of transcendent joy and gratitude in his second painting, emphasising not only the mother's devotion to her son but also her devout gratitude to God for his unexpected – and indeed almost miraculous – salvation.

By drawing so extensively on traditional religious iconography, Penny can only have been seeking to ensure that his pictures would exemplify enduring Christian values and ideals. In this way, he was again able to serve the cause of the Humane Society

and at the same time realise his own wider artistic aims. On the one hand, the alignment of Penny's works with quintessentially Christian imagery promoted the Society's claim to be an institution that acted in conformity with and indeed fulfilment of moral and religious duty. On the other hand, the range of visual references that Penny deployed served to ensure that his paintings not only functioned as immediately attractive and comprehensible genre paintings but also possessed an authentic aesthetic status as works in a 'grand manner'. As such, they must be seen as having been in conscious sympathy with the Academy's most elevated cultural and aesthetic aspirations. That this was indeed the case is implied by a remarkable affinity between Penny's latest works and those of a small number of earlier genre painters who had – apparently in isolation from each other – made explicit use of a very similar compositional and iconographic strategy. Amongst the most suggestive examples is the sixteenth-century Dutch painter Pieter Aertsen (1508-75), whose market scenes typically combine straightforward still-life compositions with more ambitious religious representations. For example, in Aertsen's *A Meat Stall with the Holy Family Giving Alms* (fig. 102) from 1551, the foreground is dominated by a Butcher's abundant display of meat whilst, in the background, we find a diminutive group depicting the Virgin Mary dispensing charity during her flight to Egypt.<sup>371</sup> Even more strikingly, some sixty years later we find Diego Velázquez making use of a nearly identical strategy in his *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary* (fig. 103) from 1618. This time, the foreground can be seen to depict a kitchen scene showing two female figures preparing food, whilst the background vignette consists of a miniaturistic rendition of Christ teaching Mary. Direct influence on Penny, while by no means out of the question, is perhaps unlikely given the isolated nature of these examples. The parallel is significant, however, precisely because of this: it suggests that there were enduring features of early modern artistic and religious life that prompted structurally similar solutions to a similar problem from otherwise very different artists. In all these cases, we find simple genre subject matter being imbued with moral significance through direct reference to themes and motifs more usually associated with the most elevated forms of Christian art and, in this way, attaining a status akin to traditional historical painting.

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<sup>371</sup> Another version of Aertsen's picture is held by Uppsala University, Sweden.

*A Boy Taken Out of the Water Drowned* and *The Boy by Proper Means Recovered* must therefore be seen as carefully conceived successors to Penny's earlier moralising works. As we have seen, Francklin's sermon was apparently intended from the outset as a suitable vehicle for the artist to further his reputation as a moral painter. Penny then took this dramatic narrative and developed it in a way that allowed him to enhance its aesthetic and emotional impact. Employing an extensive series of formal and psychological consonances and contrasts, he heightened its affective power by privileging emotional response over action. The resulting web of sympathetic responses between the figures of the milkmaid and the drowned boy and, in turn, between the milkmaid and the viewer, enabled Penny to create an image that centralised the moral power of human sensibility and thus appealed to the most refined feelings of the Academy's audience. At the same time, he sought to emphasise the religious significance of his subject matter by deploying compositional and narrative devices overtly drawn from some of the most celebrated images in the Christian artistic tradition. The artist thus ensured that his viewers would appreciate these newest pieces as highly moral performances that transcended the traditional limitations of genre painting to attain a more elevated, exemplary status. As we shall see, Penny's subsequent works sustained this same model, combining appealing and affecting subject matter with carefully researched references to the most prestigious cultural and spiritual values.

## II

At first sight, Penny's 1781 Academy submission, *Lavinia, Daughter of the Once Rich Acasto, Discovered Gleaning* might appear to represent a move away from the moralised form of genre painting that he had pioneered in *The Virtuous Comforted* and *The Profligate Punished*, and developed further in the Humane Society paintings. The theme of this latest work was drawn from James Thomson's poem *The Seasons*, a celebrated evocation of the British landscape that had, in the years since its first publication in complete form in 1730, attained classic status. One of a series of short romantic narratives with which Thomson enlivened his work, the

episode that Penny depicted occurs within the poem's third section, *Autumn*. Placed after a vivid description of the fruitful but declining landscape, it details the chance encounter between Palemon, a young and affluent landowner who, relishing the beauty of the autumn harvest, decides to enjoy an impromptu walk through his estate, and Lavinia, an impoverished but high-born female who has been reduced to gleaning – gathering the stray ears of wheat left on the fields after the harvest – on Palemon's property. After being struck by her beauty, Palemon soon recognises her as the daughter of Acasto, his esteemed former patron and the source of his fortune. Overcome by joy and gratitude, Palemon entreats Lavinia to accept his hand in marriage, to which she consents with a blush. By choosing this episode from a celebrated poetic work, it might appear that Penny was seeking to return to the more full-blown historical approach he had previously attempted in works based on comparable literary subjects, such as *Imogen Discovered in the Cave* and *Jane Shore Led to Do Penance at St. Paul's*. My purpose here, however, is to argue that the artist's latest canvas not only conforms to, but further develops, his distinctive form of genre painting.

In order to begin to see how Penny developed Thomson's poem in this way, it is first necessary to gain a clear sense of its general treatment. This poses some challenges, because, like Penny's 1780 pairing, this painting can no longer be traced. Fortunately, however, a large-format photograph, apparently dating from the 1940s, when the piece was handled by the London art dealers Agnew's, survives at the Witt Library (fig. 104).<sup>372</sup> Whilst only a monochrome print, this photograph provides a clear impression of Penny's original painting. Focusing on the moment when Palemon first encounters Lavinia, Penny's image shows the two protagonists standing beside one another in the midst of a fertile landscape. To the right, we see Palemon, with an elegant dog, seemingly some form of water spaniel, at his side. In his left hand he carries a stout walking stick, suggesting that he has just been engaged in a walk across his estate. Now, however, he stands motionless before us, registering his recognition of Lavinia through little more than a raised hand. Lavinia, meanwhile, is pictured beside him, her eyes modestly downcast. A sheaf of wheat lies at her feet, and she grasps a few more stalks in her hand, which together represent the meagre pickings that she has gathered from Palemon's fields. In the

<sup>372</sup> Unfortunately, no further records of the work's sale and purchase survive at Agnew's.

distance behind them, we see open fields and gently rolling hills, where we glimpse the harvest taking place. The corn has been cut and gathered into sheaves, which the harvesters are piling onto a heavily laden cart with the help of their pitchforks. Their work, then, must nearly be over and the field is now filled with women who bend down to glean. Only one pair of figures has abandoned their toil: on the far left, we see a harvester and his lover in a clumsy embrace, forming a comic and clownish foil to the more elevated romance that takes place in the foreground.

Penny's choice of this episode as the subject for his latest exhibition work was a significant one. Thomson's poem had a remarkable reputation in eighteenth-century British literary culture. First of all, it was regarded as a true masterpiece, one of the most prestigious and highly acclaimed literary productions of its time. From the moment that *Winter*, the first part of Thomson's poetic account of the four seasons, was published in 1726, the poem enjoyed extraordinary critical success. Likening Thomson's achievements to those of Milton, an early writer confidently predicted the poet's enduring renown:

Whoever this Gentleman be, whose Name is prefixed to this Poem, whether a real or a fictitious Person, (for I own it is with some Difficulty I can believe it to be the first Performance of a young Poet;) whoever he be, I say, he must be allow'd to have the genuine Spirit of sublime poetry in him, and bids fair to reach at length the Height of *Milton's* character...<sup>373</sup>

The reputation of Thomson's poem only grew as the remaining parts – first *Summer*, then *Spring* and finally *Autumn* – were published over the next four years. By the time the work was published for the first time as an integral whole in 1730, it was already sufficiently renowned to attract a host of prestigious subscribers, including the Queen herself.<sup>374</sup> Other notable literary productions followed, including *A Poem Sacred to the Memory of Sir Isaac Newton* and *The Castle of Indolence*, ensuring that when he died in 1748, Thomson's literary immortality appeared to be assured. Indeed, a contemporary eulogy of the poet envisages his reception by the great poets in Parnassus:

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<sup>373</sup> *The London Journal*, 4 June 1726.

<sup>374</sup> See James Sambrook's ODNB entry on Thomson.

The Muses Sons with cheerful Looks advance, / To hail the Partner of their deathless Joy. / See Spencer deigns to point his mazy Way, / Thro' Mansions ever new; and Milton's self / Obsequious bending from his laurel'd Throne, / Now greets his noblest Son, and to the Choir / Or circling Angels, yields the heav'nly Guest...<sup>375</sup>

This extraordinary status was formally recognised in 1762 when a magnificent monument to the author was erected in Westminster Abbey. Thomson thus joined the other great figures of English letters in Poet's Corner, and attained permanent public recognition of his eminence.

At the same time as being regarded as an unimpeachable literary classic, however, *The Seasons* also seems to have held unrivalled appeal for an unusually broad audience. From the 1750s onwards, and especially in the years following the lapse of the original copyright in 1765, a plethora of new editions – at least one hundred in the years before 1781 alone – made the poem available to an exceptionally wide range of readers.<sup>376</sup> Among the editions were small and cheap reprints, such as those published in Dublin and Edinburgh, as well as more ambitious ventures that featured an array of elaborate supplementary material, such as 'lives' of the poet and critical commentaries on the text.<sup>377</sup> For instance, Patrick Murdoch's two volume edition of *Thomson's Works* included a pioneering account of the poet's life and writings as well as a reprint of William Collins's *Ode Occasioned by the Death of Mr Thomson*. Another such publication is George Wright's 1777 edition which, as its title-page makes clear, combined a complete reprint of the poem with a biographical account of the author and detailed expository notes on the text. This range of publishing activity is testimony to the fact that, by the later eighteenth century, Thomson's poem was widely recognised as the most popular literary work of the English language.

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<sup>375</sup> [Robert Shiells], *Musidorus: A Poem Sacred to the Memory of James Thomson* (London, 1748), p. 23.

<sup>376</sup> For the full list of editions see Appendix 1 in Ralph Cohen, *The Art of Discrimination: Thomson's 'The Seasons' and the Language of Criticism* (London, 1964), pp. 474-80.

<sup>377</sup> See Jung's discussion of the numerous cheaper editions of *The Seasons* published in Scotland and Ireland from the late 1760s onwards in his 'Visual Interpretations, Print, and Illustrations of Thomson's *The Seasons*, 1730-1797', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, vol. 34, no. 2 (spring 2010): 23-64, esp. 32-33.

The text's unprecedentedly universal appeal was noted by contemporary critics such as John More. Writing in his pioneering volume, *Strictures Critical and Sentimental on Thomson's Seasons* from 1777, More asserted that:

The universal popularity of *The Seasons*, is a better proof of their intrinsic merit, than all the criticisms in the world can be to the contrary. This charming poem, so uniformly rural and enchanting, is equally read in town and country, by the oldest not less than the youngest. Those who have no taste, as well as those who have the most polished ones, are yet confessedly susceptible of the pleasure it affords. I have found it in the hands of shepherds, in the remotest solitudes, who never saw another book, save their bible; and heard some of its finest passages repeated by clowns who had no motive for getting it by heart, but that of its delineating so well, many scenes and circumstances, in which, they are necessarily and deeply interested.<sup>378</sup>

Moreover, the dramatic and human qualities of the short narrative episodes with which Thomson adorned his poem seem to have proven peculiarly accessible and engaging to readers. As the renowned philosopher James Beattie asked in his *Essays on Poetry and Music, as They Affect the Mind* from 1778

Do not all readers of taste receive peculiar pleasure from those little tales or episodes, with which Thomson's descriptive poem on the seasons is here and there enlivened? And are they not sensible, that the thunder-storm would not have been half so interesting without the tale of the two lovers; nor the harvest scene, without that of Palemon and Lavinia, nor the driving snows, without that exquisite picture of a man perishing among them?<sup>379</sup>

Few other works could at once command the approval of the most fastidious critics while also being familiar to a large and diverse non-elite audience. *The Seasons* therefore effortlessly traversed conventional barriers between elite and popular culture to attain the status of a universal classic.

By choosing to portray Palemon and Lavinia in 1781, then, Penny was both depicting an episode from a work of 'high' literature, and also capitalising on the

<sup>378</sup> John More, *Strictures, Critical and Sentimental, on Thomson's Seasons* (London, 1777), p. 67.

<sup>379</sup> James Beattie, *Essays on Poetry and Music as They Affect the Mind* (London, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 1779), p. 34.

enduring – and growing – popular appeal of Thomson and his most celebrated poem. In this sense, Penny's latest work conforms to the strategy – so clearly perceptible in his *A Boy Taken Out of the Water Drowned* and *The Boy by Proper Means Recovered* – of selecting subject matter which combined recognisably elevated purposes with a clear appeal for a broad urban audience. Whereas the artist's earlier images were explicitly associated with one of London's most prominent and fashionable philanthropic organisations, his latest painting drew on the single most widely-known and appreciated poetic work in the literary canon. In addition, the poem, extolling as it did the beauties of the British landscape and the simple virtues of its rustic inhabitants, had strong patriotic associations that further enhanced its suitability for exhibition in a self-consciously nationalistic institution. Continuing, in this respect, the practice of choosing subject matter strongly identified with British history and native culture – as in *The Blacksmiths*, *Imogen Discovered in the Cave* and *Rosamond and Queen Eleanor* – Penny's latest image once again sought to unite his diverse audience in pursuit of a distinctly British national ideal. The artist had selected a subject which the Academy's viewers would already be familiar with and favourable towards, but which also enjoyed a status that conformed to the institution's elevated ideals.

Penny's dual strategy becomes even more apparent when we relate his treatment of the subject to earlier depictions of Thomson's *The Seasons*. To some extent, Penny's image must be seen as the successor to a whole series of earlier exhibition works. The poem's narrative episodes had first been introduced to the exhibition room by the renowned landscape painter, Richard Wilson.<sup>380</sup> In 1765, the very year that the copyright on Thomson's poem lapsed, Wilson exhibited *A Summer Storm with the Story of Two Lovers from Thomson* at the Society of Artists.<sup>381</sup> The present whereabouts of the painting are unknown but we can gain a clear impression of its appearance from William Woollett's 1766 engraving, published under the title *Celadon and Amelia* (fig. 105). This shows that Wilson's work depicted a dramatically mountainous landscape that, in the manner typical of the artist, drew

<sup>380</sup> For a general account of the exhibition imagery based on Thomson's *The Seasons*, see Richard D. Altick, *Paintings from Books: Art and Literature in Britain 1760-1900* (Columbus, 1985), pp. 390-94. For a more detailed discussion of Wilson's role in propagating imagery of *The Seasons*, see Sandro Jung, 'Painterly "Readings" of *The Seasons*, 1766-1829', *Word and Image*, vol. 26, no. 1 (2009): 68-82, esp. 72-73.

<sup>381</sup> See item no. 157 in *A Catalogue of the Pictures...Exhibited by the Society of Artists... April the Twenty-Third, 1765*, p. 14.

heavily on the idioms of classical landscape painting whilst incorporating distinctively British elements, such as the ruined castle that crowns the escarpment in the middle distance. This combination of native and Italianate motifs is recognised to be the consequence of Wilson's major artistic concern, which was to provide a compelling British equivalent to the classical landscapes of Nicolas Poussin, Gaspard Dughet, Salvatore Rosa and Claude Lorrain. In this context, it seems clear that Wilson had found in Thomson's characters a fitting British equivalent to the ancient Greek and Roman mythological figures that added narrative interest to the works of his great Continental predecessors.

Wilson's example was followed by a host of lesser artists. Throughout the 1760s and 1770s we find a succession of paintings in London's exhibition rooms embellished with scenes from *The Seasons*, including works by Thomas Smith of Derby, George Mullins, William Williams and John Greenwood.<sup>382</sup> Although some of these works cannot be traced, either in the original or in reproduction, in every case where there is a record of the composition, it can be shown to adhere closely to the model established by Wilson. Thus, each work consists of a dramatic landscape filled with precipitous crags, forbidding castles and verdant hills within which the figures form a relatively minor, incidental component. By the late 1770s, it therefore seems, the narrative episodes from *The Seasons* had a well-established status as a fitting subject for the exhibition arena.

Penny's choice of subject tied his work closely to this established tradition of imagery. At the same time, however, *Lavinia Discovered Gleaning* departs from the example set by previous exhibition works in important ways. As we have seen, it seems that almost all the earlier pictures conformed to the basic pictorial formula

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<sup>382</sup> Smith of Derby exhibited his *A Landscape with the Story of Palemon and Lavinia* (untraced) at the Society of Artists in 1767, whilst Mullins exhibited *A Cataract: A Rude Scene—Vide Thompson's Seasons* (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford) at the Academy in 1772 and Williams exhibited *Thunderstorm with the Death of Amelia* (Tate Gallery, London) at the same institution in 1778. For the original catalogue listing for Smith, see item no. 149 in *A Catalogue of the Pictures...Exhibited at the Great Room in Spring-Garden, Charing-Cross, April the Twenty-Second, 1767, by the Society of Artists of Great Britain* (London, 1767), p. 12. For Mullins and Williams, see item nos. 162 and 346 in *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy, MDCCLXXII*, p. 16 and *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy, MDCCLXXVIII; The Tenth* (London, 1778), p. 25 respectively. Greenwood's untraced piece, actually entitled *Palemon and Lavinia*, was exhibited at the Society of Artists in 1774 and is listed as item no. 103 in *A Catalogue of the Pictures...Exhibited by the Society of Artists of Great Britain, at their New-Room, near Exeter-Exchange, Strand. April the Twenty-Fifth, 1774* (London, 1774), p. 12.

established by Wilson in 1765.<sup>383</sup> The narrative episodes are reduced to a relatively subordinate role, serving to adorn and add human interest to their broader setting. In this context, Penny's latest exhibition work appears strikingly unconventional. By focusing primarily on the interactions between the two protagonists of Thomson's narrative rather than on the landscape around them, *Lavinia Discovered Gleaning* broke with a very well established strand of exhibition imagery and introduced a new approach to portraying the poem to the Academy. Penny, in other words, had taken the anglicised model of classical landscape painting that had previously been dominant and replaced it with a characteristically genre-like approach.

Penny's depiction of Palemon and Lavinia was not entirely original, however. A second strand of imagery related to Thomson's poem can be traced in the realm of print culture, and it is here that the closest parallels to Penny's approach are to be found. It was in this more popular marketplace that, as Ralph Cohen and, more recently, Sandro Jung have shown, representations of *The Seasons* underwent fundamental change in the period immediately before Penny submitted his latest exhibit.<sup>384</sup> Previously, almost all illustrations of the poem had been based on a suite of designs by William Kent, engraved by Nicolas Tardier for John Millan's and Andrew Millar's 1730 quarto edition (fig. 106).<sup>385</sup> Forming elaborate frontispieces to each of the four poems, Kent's specially commissioned plates all follow the same basic formula: a 'heroic' landscape is shown peopled with figures engaged in typical seasonal activities whilst the heavens are replete with nature deities and zodiacal motifs appropriate to the time of year being depicted. This overt deployment of allegorical and classicising imagery was clearly intended to provide an appropriately sophisticated visual equivalent to the symbolic content of Thomson's highly prestigious poem.

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<sup>383</sup> Greenwood's work might, at first sight, appear to be an exception, given that its title is simply *Palemon and Lavinia*, suggesting a stronger emphasis on the two protagonists. However, as the comments of a contemporary German critic imply, the painting also seems to have been a landscape work with Thomson's characters – being 'too small to display the most powerful expression' – assuming a more secondary role. For the critic's full account, see 'Vermischte Nachrichten: Engelland', in *Neue Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften und der Freyen Künste*, vol. 16 (Leipzig, 1774): 314-15.

<sup>384</sup> See Cohen's fifth chapter, 'Literary Criticism and Illustrations of *The Seasons*', in his *The Art of Discrimination*, pp. 248-314, for the pioneering account of the illustration history of Thomson's poem. This can now be supplemented with Sandro Jung's 'Visual Interpretations', which contributes much additional detail on the subject.

<sup>385</sup> James Thomson, *The Seasons* (London, 1730).

Kent's images dominated the publishing scene for approximately fifty years after their initial appearance, having been reprinted or re-engraved in up to twenty single English-language editions between 1736 and 1782.<sup>386</sup> These editions included both full-scale quarto reprints from the original plates as well as a series of reduced versions based on smaller octavo copies of the plates engraved by Pierre Fourdrinier. The latter were, in their turn, subsequently adapted and simplified for a series of popular editions, especially after the lapse of the poem's original copyright.<sup>387</sup>

Penny's seemingly straightforward representation of Palemon and Lavinia self-evidently has little in common with Kent's complex allegories. In the 1770s, however, the dominance of Kent's formula began to wane. During this period a series of new illustrations by a variety of practitioners were produced for three new editions of Thomson's text. The first appear to have been a set of anonymous illustrations produced for an edition of Thomson's poem published in Dublin in 1773.<sup>388</sup> This was followed by George Wright's 1777 edition, which was accompanied by a set of illustrations designed by Wright himself and engraved by Edward Malpas.<sup>389</sup> The third, and arguably most sophisticated, was the sequence of eight illustrations by David Allen and William Hamilton which appeared in John Murray's refined 1778 edition of the text.<sup>390</sup>

As Sandro Jung has argued, these editions mark a fundamental shift in the pattern of visual representations of *The Seasons*, and it is in the imagery associated with this change that possible precedents for Penny's image begin to emerge. Whereas Kent's allegorical images harked back to Renaissance iconographical traditions, the newer illustrations show an increasing interest in human incident and emotion. This is particularly evident in Wright's illustrations, which, centralising rural life, marked a

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<sup>386</sup> The only significant exception was Millan's and Millar's more economical illustrated octavo edition, also published in 1730, which contained four recycled plates by Bernard Picart, showing allegorical statues of the seasons from the gardens of Versailles. As Ralph Cohen has noted, Picart's engravings were of no direct relevance to the poem and it is therefore unsurprising to find that there is no evidence of these images having been subsequently republished. See Cohen, *The Art of Discrimination*, p. 251.

<sup>387</sup> See Jung, 'Visual Interpretations', 32-33.

<sup>388</sup> James Thomson, *The Seasons. In Four Books. With Britannia, By James Thomson... Illustrated with a New Set of Designs* (Dublin, 1773). For a reproduction of the third plate, *Autumn*, from this edition, see Cohen, *The Art of Discrimination*, fig. 9.

<sup>389</sup> George Wright (ed.), *The Seasons, in Four Books, by the Late James Thomson, with the Life of the Author* (London, 1777).

<sup>390</sup> James Thomson, *The Seasons. A New Edition* (London, 1778).

clear shift from the pastoral to the Georgic mode.<sup>391</sup> In place of Kent's heroic landscape, we find a more restrained and realistic depiction of Thomson's poem that is devoid of any kind of overt allegorical reference. Wright's illustration of *Autumn* (fig. 107), for example, presents a familiar rural scene: a pair of sportsmen, dressed in the characteristic attire of the late eighteenth-century gentleman, shoot game in the foreground; behind them, reapers gather in the harvest from the fields, while a man idly fishes in the mill race before them; and against the horizon we see silhouetted the spire of an archetypal English country church. In this image, then, Kent's self-consciously sophisticated and Italianate vision of the rural idyll has been resolutely translated into the English vernacular. Wright's illustration is thus far closer in spirit to Penny's work than any of the earlier representations of *The Seasons*. The portrayal of figures in contemporary dress is a particularly notable feature shared by Wright's and Penny's works, as is the harvest scene that appears in the background of both images. It would appear, then, that the artist's latest exhibition work at the very least shows close affinities with illustrations in contemporary publications of Thomson's work.

Even closer parallels can be drawn with Hamilton's illustrations for the 1778 edition, which depart still further from Kent's model by focusing for the first time on the narrative episodes that Beattie had praised as a particular source of *The Seasons*' appeal. Amongst these is the earliest engraved portrayal of Palemon and Lavinia (fig. 108) to appear in an English-language edition of the text.<sup>392</sup> Representing the moment when Palemon, after having recognised Lavinia as the daughter of his long-dead patron and protector, proposes marriage, this image reflects a move away from the more formal and intellectualised conception of poetry evident in Kent's illustrations towards one rooted in the emotional responses of a diverse audience. The romantic figure of Palemon, attired in pseudo-Shakespearian costume, holds one hand to his heart whilst gesturing with the other towards the fields that Lavinia will soon share with him. For the first time, then, Hamilton has placed Palemon and Lavinia at the formal and narrative centre of the image, making their interactions the

<sup>391</sup> Jung, 'Visual Interpretations', 34.

<sup>392</sup> It is possible that Hamilton and Murray may have found their inspiration for this illustration from an earlier engraving of Thomson's two protagonists that was produced by C. Eisen and C. Bacquoy for a French translation of the poem published in 1759. For a reproduction of this image, see Cohen, *The Art of Discrimination*, fig. 30.

viewer's principal focus. In this respect his illustration clearly provides a much closer parallel to Penny's image than the earlier exhibition works, with their characteristic emphasis on landscape rather than on the protagonists themselves. In addition, both Hamilton and Penny contrast the imagery of romance with that of rural toil and labour embodied by the figures of the gleaners in both images. Just as in Penny's image, the link between these figures and Lavinia is made explicit by the sheaf of corn she is shown holding in her hand. We are clearly intended to compare Thomson's heroine with these other characters and to imagine her – as we are asked to imagine them – as a lowly rustic worker undertaking an arduous and inelegant physical task, and marvel still more at her imminent admission to Palemon's elevated social sphere. Such similarities clearly show that Penny's work should be situated within a pattern of changes taking place in the environment of book illustration and print publication.

The most likely direct intermediary between works such as Hamilton's and Penny's own practice, however, can be found in the first known furniture print of *Palemon and Lavinia*, published in 1780 by James Birchall (fig. 109). Designed by the pastelist William Lawranson and engraved by John Raphael Smith, this large and elegant mezzotint provides a refined and fashionable reworking of Hamilton's image that offers an even closer precedent for Penny's painting. It, too, is dominated by the standing figures of Palemon and Lavinia, who are not only significantly enlarged in scale but are prominently positioned in the centre of the foreground. Rather than presenting Thomson's protagonists as incidental figures within a larger landscape setting, this print – in a way that closely prefigures Penny's painting – focuses almost exclusively on this pair of characters and on the romantic exchange that takes place between them. The formal relationship between the principal protagonists is also strikingly similar in both works. Both Penny and Lawranson show Palemon positioned to the right of Lavinia with his body turned inwards towards her, as she responds with downcast gaze and bowed head. Moreover, Penny, like Lawranson, places Thomson's characters on either side of a tree, the trunk rising directly between them. This motif not only contributes to the fundamentally rustic character of the scene but further emphasises the focus on Palemon and Lavinia by creating a natural screen or barrier between them and the distant landscape. Thus, in both

images, this feature doubles as an essential formal device for distinguishing the foreground action from the various narrative incidents shown in the background.

The resulting sharp division between foreground and background in Lawranson's image can also be seen to parallel the unusual division of space found in Penny's paintings of this period. Like the artist's earlier 1780 pairing, Lawranson's scene similarly comprises two complementary but distinct pictorial zones. The affinity in formal approach is striking, and in this respect Lawranson's image seems to have proved a particularly suitable model for Penny's later work. It is noteworthy, for example, that both images use the background to the left of the principal figures as the location for a vignette depicting the distant harvest. In addition, both Lawranson's and Penny's images show an embracing couple amongst the harvesters, probably an attempt to dramatize the moment in Thomson's poem when Palemon reflects with distress on the idea of fair Lavinia being embraced by a boorish 'clown':

'What pity! that so delicate a Form,  
'By Beauty kindled, where enlivening Sense,  
'And more than vulgar Goodness seem to dwell,  
'Should be devoted to the rude Embrace  
'Of some indecent Clown?...<sup>393</sup>

In Lawranson's image, the lines are reflected in the open shirt of the male labourer as well as in the way he casually extends his arms over his partner's shoulders. Penny's figures are still closer in mood to Thomson's poem, showing the harvesters in a crude and almost inebriated embrace, with the labourer appearing to almost smother his hapless lover. The result is that the two artists' images display common narrative as well as formal features, sharing not only the same overall compositional structure but also specific narrative details. Such an extensive pattern of similarities makes it exceedingly likely that Penny drew directly on Lawranson's treatment of the story of Palemon and Lavinia. Thus, we can see that the starting point for the artist's latest work was not simply a renowned literary classic, but a highly accessible graphic work that reflected the increasingly universal appeal of Thomson's narrative episode.

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<sup>393</sup> Thomson, *Autumn*, lines 237-41. This and all subsequent quotes are drawn from the standard modern edition, James Sambrook (ed.), *The Seasons* (Oxford, 1981).

Once again, it seems, Penny was looking beyond the Academy's self-consciously elitist aesthetic to identify more popular styles of representation in contemporary print culture.

However, no less striking than the similarities between Penny's treatment of the scene and those characteristic of contemporary print culture are a number of significant differences. Both Hamilton's and, even more so, Lawranson's works present highly romanticised, almost fantastical, scenes that are clearly intended to take the reader into an imaginary otherworld. This is perhaps most evident in the conspicuously theatrical costume worn by the figure of Palemon as well as in Lavinia's implausibly refined and urbane appearance, while the evocatively irregular forms of Palemon's ancient country house in Lawranson's print further enhance the sense of escape into poetic fantasy. When placed against these predecessors, Penny's image seems quite remarkable in its sobriety and simplicity, as well as its unambiguously realistic handling. It is striking, for example, that both protagonists are depicted in contemporary dress. Palemon wears a plain, dark-coloured frock coat, simple but well-cut, over light-coloured breeches and double-breasted waistcoat. His neatly curled hair emerges from beneath a cocked broad-brimmed hat of a style strikingly reminiscent of Wright of Derby's exactly contemporaneous portrait of *Sir Brooke Boothby*.<sup>394</sup> This costume is typical of the plain but well-cut attire worn by late eighteenth-century country gentlemen. Lavinia is pictured in the simplest possible clothing: a coarse shift and petticoat of homespun russet wool, without even a gown to cover her stays, a thin jacket and the simplest type of broad-brimmed straw hat. For contemporary viewers, such modest clothing would immediately have identified Lavinia as part of the very poorest stratum of the rural working class.<sup>395</sup>

Penny, moreover, placed far more emphasis than Lawranson on the realities of labour and on representing a credible rural community. His harvest scene, for example, presents what appears to be a highly authentic representation of rural life, with much convincing and finely worked detail in the rendering of the horses and cart, the costume of the labourers and gleaners, and their handling of the harvest. This is quite unlike Lawranson's work, with its conventionally charming setting and

<sup>394</sup> For a good quality reproduction of Wright's portrait, see Egerton, *Wright of Derby*, cat. no. 59.

<sup>395</sup> See John Styles, *The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven and London, 2007), pp. 19-55 for a discussion of working class costume in the period.

excessively refined figure of Lavinia, whose self-conscious modesty is betrayed by a smile that verges on coyness. The sobriety and simplicity of Penny's painting therefore broke with the pattern of highly romantic and self-consciously idealised imagery that can be traced back to Hamilton's pseudo-Shakespearean representation of Thomson's characters. Whereas Lawranson took the romantic and fantastical elements of Hamilton's image and exaggerated them still further, Penny produced the most emphatically contemporary portrayal of Thomson's episode ever executed.

Such a markedly contemporary approach, in particular the meticulous observation of the protagonists' physique and costume, gives Penny's image something of the quality of a portrait of the time. This impression is further reinforced by Penny's composition, with its strong contrast between foreground and background. Although this is, as we have seen, clearly reminiscent of Lawranson's work, it is here deployed in a more emphatic way. Not only are the main figures physically separated from the unfolding action but they are also set against – as we find in contemporary portraiture – a broad swathe of sky and foliage, a feature which serves to intensify their monumentality so that they appear to take on a greater stature. We can even see the figure of Palemon as a close counterpart to the many country gentlemen that feature in the contemporary portraits of Gainsborough, Wright of Derby, and, perhaps most particularly, Nathaniel Dance-Holland. An especially striking parallel is to be found in a series of portraits painted by Dance-Holland in the 1770s, such as that of the celebrated land surveyor, Thomas Browne (fig. 110). Both Penny's and Dance-Holland's images depict their subjects in the midst of their estates, stout walking sticks in hand and with their dogs at their sides. Like Penny's figure of Palemon, Browne is shown standing beside an oak tree in an extensive rolling landscape. Behind Browne, too, we see of a vivid vignette of rural life, this time of a man ploughing the fields. In its sturdy frankness and lack of obvious idealisation, this portrait not only shares a similar compositional approach, but has obvious resonances with the similarly sober treatment of Penny's painting.

It seems likely that Penny was once again motivated to use a portrait-like compositional approach in part by a desire to ensure that his works could hold their own in an Academy context dominated by full-length portraits. The image's straightforward and unpretentious treatment, however, was not an inevitable aspect of this and its implications and motivations demand further exploration. As we have

seen, the most significant consequence of Penny's approach was to take the iconography of Thomson's poem out of the realm of poetic fantasy and place it firmly in the contemporary world. In doing so, the 'literary' and 'historical' aspects of many of the conventional visual representations of the narrative were negated in favour of an emphatically genre-like treatment. Thus, in spite of its subject matter, Penny's latest exhibition work has more in common with his earlier genre paintings than it does with historical works such as *Jane Shore Led to Do Penance at St. Paul's*. The results, moreover, were sufficiently unconventional to be seized upon by contemporary critics as a subject for both sympathetic and hostile commentary. One critic, writing in the *St James's Chronicle*, clearly found this approach pleasing and praised Penny's work in the following highly effusive terms:

It is a great deal more difficult to be simple than to be pompous. All artists, as well as Writers, will allow it. Mr Penny very laudably disdains the Glare and Bustle of the present Taste. The Choice of his Subjects do Honour to his Heart. His Drawing is pure, his Colouring true, and the unaffected Expression of the Faces completes the Tribute of Applause which Truth obliges every Critick to bestow on this good Man, who all his Life has pursued with Eagerness his Researches after Nature; is always ready to communicate his Knowledge to others, and preserves a Heart uncontaminated by Partiality.<sup>396</sup>

This critic, it would seem, was very conscious of the contrast between Penny's sober and 'simple' style of representation and the pretentious idioms preferred by his contemporaries, and saw in this its most distinctive – and laudable – quality. Clearly recognising the moral significance of this style of painting, which he described as 'pure' and 'true', the critic went on to characterise Penny himself as a 'good Man'. The artist, he implied, had dedicated his life not only to attaining knowledge of nature but, in the manner of a true scholar, communicating it to others.

For others, however, the same truthfulness in representation was less appealing. A critic writing in the *Morning Chronicle* claimed that 'No. 101, by Mr Penny, is a faithful copy of nature, though unornamented, and void of all choice'.<sup>397</sup> Another critic, writing in the *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, was still more unsparing in

<sup>396</sup> *St James's Chronicle*, 5-8 May 1781.

<sup>397</sup> *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 10 May 1781.

his criticism of Penny's picture. After announcing that 'We are surprised and sorry to find so bad a picture produced (by the Professor of Painting to the Royal Academy) from so charming a subject', he went on to lament that,

The beautiful Lavinia he has made a homely country girl, sweating in August under a red flannel petticoat. Happy choice of drapery! And her lover a bloated looking farmer, who has been drinking so freely that his eyes appear useless. In short, there is a tameness and want of expression throughout the whole performance.<sup>398</sup>

Although harsh, such comments again serve to demonstrate that Penny's straightforward and literal treatment of Thomson's poem was clearly not congenial to some informed contemporaries. The restraint that had been recognised by the first critic as a reflection of the virtues of truth and modesty is here seen as a failing. By deliberately avoiding the flashier approach adopted by some of his fellow exhibitors, Penny had laid himself open to charges of 'tameness' or weakness of expression. At the same time, the unabashed contemporaneity of his image could all too easily be dismissed as inappropriately familiar. Perhaps discomforted by the juxtaposition of a well-dressed Palemon with a simple peasant girl, the *Morning Chronicle's* correspondent denigrated both figures for their undistinguished appearance.<sup>399</sup> Everyday physical realities had evidently been allowed to intrude too far into the hallowed realms of art and literature, rupturing the expectation that a 'high' literary theme should be treated in a similarly elevated manner.

Was Penny's willingness to rupture this boundary simply the result of an artistic misjudgement, an inability to correctly assess the tastes of his audience? Or was there some deeper artistic and narrative purpose that can account for it? Close scrutiny, I would suggest, will make the latter explanation seem more plausible. For there is another important difference between Penny's portrayal and those of his predecessors: the precise part of Thomson's narrative portrayed. All the images of Palemon and Lavinia that preceded Penny's painting, without exception, prioritise the actual moment when Lavinia received the proposal of marriage that would rescue

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<sup>398</sup> *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 12 May 1781.

<sup>399</sup> Sandro Jung has discussed the challenges artists faced in negotiating the class differences presented in Thomson's work. See Jung, 'Visual Interpretations', p. 41.

her from poverty and, in Thomson's words, 'transplant thee safe'.<sup>400</sup> This is clearly signalled, for example, in Hamilton's image, where Palemon places his hand on his heart and gestures towards the fields that will become hers upon accepting his proposal. In Lawranson's image, the gestures are even more unambiguous: while Palemon clasps Lavinia's hand to his heart, our attention is captured not only by the verdant fields of his estate but also by the sprawling mansion that dominates the right side of the image, which very overtly signals the riches that she will enjoy as his wife. The lines from the poem inscribed under the engraving's title confirm that Lawranson intended to represent the moment of the proposal: '...won by the charm / Of goodness irresistable [sic], and all / In sweet disorder lost, she blusht consent'.

Penny's image, by contrast, appears to relate to an earlier part of the story. This is made clear not only by Penny's original title, which very specifically identifies the episode as *Lavinia Discovered Gleaning*, but also by Palemon's distinctive pose. Directing his gaze away from Lavinia and towards some unseen object, he assumes an almost prophetic, visionary air. His right hand, moreover, is held out in a gesture that can be readily identified as a conventional representation of the emotional impact of sudden recognition or unexpected discovery. For example, Penny's earlier *Imogen Discovered in the Cave* shows both its protagonists in a closely related pose, greeting each other with raised hands and similarly distracted expressions.

Palemon's distant gaze, then, was clearly intended to reflect the intensity of the moment when 'mingled Passions...thro' his Nerves in shivering Transport ran', as he realised that he had at last found his dead patron's daughter for whom he had been searching in vain for many years.<sup>401</sup> In spite of this, however, and unlike Lawranson's character, he does not attempt to clasp her hand or indeed make any physical contact with her. In this way, Penny's image strikingly combines emotional intensity with great propriety and restraint, since Palemon and Lavinia's encounter remains entirely chaste. The result is that Penny's painting eschews that part of the story with the most clearly established popular appeal in order to focus on the protagonists' differing emotional responses as they encounter each other once again. By the same token, and again in direct contrast to Hamilton's and Lawranson's

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<sup>400</sup> Thomson, *Autumn*, line 279.

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.*, lines 256-57.

treatments of the scene, there are no overt references to the material gains Lavinia will make by consenting to marry Palemon.

It is this decision to change the focus of the earlier illustrations that offers the key to understanding Penny's willingness to produce such an overtly contemporary representation. By focusing in this way on Palemon's discovery of Lavinia, rather than on her rescue and the ensuing material transformation of her situation, Penny was arguably encouraging the viewer to consider the deeper significance of the episode. If we compare Penny's image to the relevant lines of Thomson's poem, we can infer that his portrayal of Lavinia was intended to emphasise the qualities of modesty and virtue extolled by the author. According to Thomson, the unwonted simplicity of Lavinia's dress and attitude show that she is 'thoughtless of beauty', while many of her charms are concealed by her 'downcast modesty'.<sup>402</sup> Penny's figure of Lavinia, upon close scrutiny, can be seen to represent precisely these qualities. Although she appears at first sight to be somewhat ungainly, when viewed closely we find that her face is delicately modelled, with fine, full lips and slender nose. Her soft, slightly arched brows and downcast eyes also lend her a humble and gently doleful demeanour, reflecting her modesty and simplicity. Similarly, Palemon's distracted expression conveys not only surprise but also the ardent feelings of 'Love, Gratitude, and Pity' that brought him, in Thomson's original poem, to tearfully express 'the pious Rapture of his Soul'.<sup>403</sup> Thus, in Penny's image, Palemon becomes not simply a figure of romantic fantasy but the representative of benevolent humanity, moved to deep emotion by the plight of his erstwhile protector's virtuous daughter. We can also see the elegant but simple attire in which Penny clothes Palemon as an attempt to convey his moral qualities in visual terms, its simplicity signalling his straightforward and unpretentious character. In this respect, Palemon can almost be seen as the male equivalent of the neatly and modestly dressed housewife in *The Virtuous Comforted*.

Such parallels are strengthened when we consider the cultural implications of gleaning in eighteenth-century England. Contemporary sources such as *The Farmer's Kalendar*, written by the great agricultural economist Arthur Young, make it clear that gleaning was a customary but not a legal right of the poor: 'the custom of

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<sup>402</sup> *Ibid.*, lines 206 and 230.

<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.*, lines 260-64.

gleaning is universal, and very ancient: in this country, however, the poor have no right to glean, but by the permission of the farmer'.<sup>404</sup> By permitting gleaning to take place in his fields, Palemon stands as the representative of a moral and benevolent form of landownership that conforms with Thomson's call to 'fling / from the full sheath, with charitable stealth / the liberal handful'.<sup>405</sup> He therefore presides over his estate in a just and equitable manner, again recalling the virtuous housewife who manages her household in a similarly benevolent and fair-minded way.

Both Penny's decision to portray a stage of the narrative that is devoid of all implications of venal concern and his distinctively realistic treatment of the scene can therefore be interpreted as strategies to reinforce the immediacy and emotional power of his image. In doing so, he was arguably seeking to promote a moralising agenda that is absent from other representations of the story. The plausibility of this interpretation can be further reinforced by reference to contemporary expositions of the poem. For it is important to note that there was in this period a strong and increasingly articulate tradition of viewing Thomson's *The Seasons* as a highly moral work. This can be traced back to Thomson himself, who wrote in his preface to the second edition of *Winter* that 'I know no subject more elevating, more amazing, more ready to the poetical enthusiasm, the philosophical reflection, and the moral sentiment than the works of nature'.<sup>406</sup> The most unambiguous statement of this approach, however, is to be found in Wright's 1777 edition, which includes in its apparatus a series of annotations that consistently stress the moral implications of Thomson's poem. The story of Palemon and Lavinia is the occasion of a whole series of edifying lessons and is described as

one of the most pleasing, natural and striking pieces in *Thompson's Seasons*; as it discovers so much humane sensibility, knowledge of life, and [is] so well calculated to touch the heart, affect the passions, and greatly interest the reader

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<sup>404</sup> Arthur Young, *The Farmer's Kalendar; Or, A Monthly Directory for All Sorts of Country Business* (London, 1771), p. 247. For an authoritative modern account of the nature and status of gleaning in eighteenth-century British agrarian society, see the work of Peter King, in particular his 'Gleaners, Farmers and the Failure of Legal Sanctions in England 1750-1850', *Past and Present*, no. 125 (November 1989): 116-50 and 'Customary Rights and Women's Earnings: The Importance of Gleaning to the Rural Labouring Poor, 1750-1850', *The Economic History Review*, New Series, vol. 44, no. 3 (August 1991): 461-76.

<sup>405</sup> Thomson, *Autumn*, lines 167-69.

<sup>406</sup> See Thomson, *Winter, A Poem* (London, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1726), p. 15.

in the distresses of an amiable tho' unfortunate young woman, and her aged parent... .<sup>407</sup>

Wright's commentary on the episode begins with a meditation on the transitory nature of wealth and fortune. Taking Thomson's description of Lavinia and her mother's descent into poverty following the death of Acasto, Wright invites us to consider that

Riches are uncertain and precarious, he who is a man of fortune to-day, may (by unforeseen calamities and misfortunes) be a beggar before to-morrow night; the psalmist says, *if riches increase set not your hand upon them*; be most solicitous to be rich in *good works*, and to have your treasure in *heaven, where moth nor rust cannot corrupt, nor thieves break thro' and steal*.<sup>408</sup>

This theme has, of course, a special affinity with the subject of *The Seasons*, which follows the changing state of the landscape from barrenness to abundance and back to barrenness again. Of even more direct relevance to Penny's image, however, is Wright's interpretation of Palemon and Lavinia's encounter, when Palemon finally realises that he has found 'Acasto's dear remains'. According to Wright,

Lavinia's being thrown in the way of *Palemon*, a friend of her father's, and his discovery of, and address to her, are happily imagined, and give the poet an opportunity of painting, in the liveliest of colours, merit and humility clothed in indigence, and sympathy, benevolence, and gratitude in the midst of wealth. This moving and pathetic speech to Lavinia, as welcome, as it was unexpected, could not but excite her surprize, while she was overcome with modest thankfulness, and the genuine effusions of virtuous esteem.<sup>409</sup>

It seems reasonable to suppose that Penny's representation of Palemon and Lavinia had comparable intentions and sought to make these two figures into quasi-emblematic representations of the virtues they exhibit: in the case of Lavinia, merit and humility in the face of poverty; and in the case of Palemon, sympathy, benevolence and – perhaps most importantly of all – gratitude for the benefits he had previously received from Acasto.

<sup>407</sup> Wright (ed.), *The Seasons, in Four Books*, p. 211.

<sup>408</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>409</sup> *Ibid.*

Such a reading makes even better sense in view of the role that the harvest had in Christian theology and iconography. Indeed, the story of Palemon and Lavinia was itself widely understood to derive from a biblical source. According to Robert Shiells and Theophilus Cibber's renowned biographical compendium, *The Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland*, Thomson's *Autumn*

seems to be the most unfinished of the four seasons. It is not, however, without its beauties; of which many have considered the story of *Lavinia*, naturally and artfully introduced, as the most affecting. The story is in itself moving and tender; and it is perhaps no diminution to this beautiful tale, that the hint of it is taken from the book of *Ruth* in the Old Testament.<sup>410</sup>

The passage refers to the story of Ruth and Boaz, in which the rich landowner Boaz notices his widowed kinswoman Ruth gleaning in his fields, as she tries to provide for herself and her mother-in-law. He takes her into his protection, ensuring that extra grain is left in the fields for her to collect and eventually decides to marry her. This story was regarded as having particular spiritual and didactic value, as contemporary religious works attest. For example, an early eighteenth-century Old Testament commentary stated that Ruth's having been chosen by Boaz and 'so grafted into the Line of Christ', was a sign of God's concern for the poor and an invaluable lesson in the value of humility, industry and dutifulness. 'And this makes' the author concluded, 'the Story remarkable and many of the passages of it...instructive and very improvable'.<sup>411</sup> Clearly, the characters of Ruth and Boaz were recognised to embody those specific virtues that were praised in Thomson's poem and emphasised in Penny's painting. The artist's choice of Palemon and Lavinia would therefore have had recognisable religious resonances for a contemporary audience, endowing his work with even greater moral and spiritual authority.

It would also have served to link Penny's work with the enduring artistic tradition that took the Old Testament story as its subject. In the context of the Academy, it is particularly notable that Poussin chose Ruth and Boaz as the subject of *Summer* (fig.

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<sup>410</sup> Robert Shiells, with additions and revisions by Theophilus Cibber, *The Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland, to the Time of Dean Swift* (5 vols) (London, 1753), vol. 5, p. 200.

<sup>411</sup> See the introductory passage to the second chapter on Ruth in Anon., *An Exposition of the Historical Books of the Old Testament* (London, 1717), not paginated.

111) in his highly ambitious series of landscape paintings representing the four seasons. In Poussin's painting, Ruth and Boaz occupy the centre of the foreground in poses that represent their characteristic virtues: Ruth kneels at Boaz's feet, gesturing to the corn she has just gathered and, in doing so, embodies the humility and industry of which the Bible speaks; Boaz, meanwhile, points out the supplicant Ruth to his workers and commands them to leave more grain for her to gather and so represents the virtue of generosity. Penny's image, although configured very differently to Poussin's scene, exhibits the same fundamental concerns with representing the protagonist's moral qualities through their gestures and stances. In this sense, his *Lavinia Discovered Gleaning* can be tied into an enduring artistic as well as religious tradition, and can even be seen as a genre-like modern equivalent to Poussin's self-consciously dignified classical work.

### III

This distinctive combination of appealing subject matter and more elevated reference shows that, in spite of first appearances, Penny's latest exhibition submission continued his commitment to a moralised mode of genre painting. Consciously eschewing the more traditional, classicising approach of previous exhibition works based on Thomson's *The Seasons*, Penny drew on a range of more popular sources from the world of print culture. Taking the human and emotional aspects of Thomson's narrative that these works emphasised while avoiding their air of fantasy and escapism, Penny produced an image exceptional both for its sobriety and 'truthfulness', as well as for its unapologetic contemporaneity. Although consequently dismissed by some critics for its tameness and prosaic plainness, others recognised in the image's treatment a distinctive moral quality. This moral concern, moreover, was reinforced by Penny's decision to portray Palemon's first recognition of Lavinia rather than his proposal of marriage. In this way, the artist was able to avoid all suspicion of venal concern whilst emphasising the benevolent emotions that his protagonists respectively embodied—gratitude and sympathy in the case of Palemon and humility and modesty in the case of Lavinia. Furthermore, by bringing

to mind the moral qualities associated with the Old Testament story of Ruth and Boaz, Penny's image attained a distinctively religious significance that aligned it with the most elevated cultural and spiritual values.

Penny's exhibition practice, it therefore seems, had finally, in the years 1780-81, attained a relatively stable form. Returning to the model of moralised genre painting he had pioneered in *The Virtuous Comforted* and *The Profligate Punished*, these works – either explicitly or implicitly – exploited the logic of contrast to enhance both their dramatic appeal to a broad audience and their moral and didactic power. In the case of the earliest paintings, the contrast was defined by the markedly different households of a virtuous housewife and a corrupt wastrel. In *A Boy Taken Out of the Water Drowned* and *The Boy by Proper Means Recovered* a similar narrative and pictorial contrast was achieved, this time through portraying the situation before and after the young victim's rescue by the Humane Society's benevolent assistant. In *Lavinia Discovered Gleaning*, the contrast is no longer made explicit through the differing scenarios shown in two paired images but is nevertheless implicit in the repetition of one of the key dramatic motifs from Penny's 1780 images, that of the rescue of a virtuous but vulnerable character by a benevolent male. In this case, the contrast resides in the emphatic difference between Lavinia's extreme poverty and Palemon's equally obvious prosperity, which clearly signals the transformation of the heroine's situation that will follow from her encounter with her father's former protégé. In all three sets of images, moreover, the use of contrast complemented and reinforced Penny's close observation of the emotional states of his characters, helping to secure the viewer's sympathetic involvement in the artist's subject matter. Indeed, Penny's concern to both represent and elicit sympathetic response formed a central theme of all these works and so reflected his commitment to contemporary moral theories that portrayed sympathy as the wellspring of benevolent action. In this way, the artist's unambiguously contemporary genre paintings were not only able to appeal to the delicate sensibilities of his audience but gain enduring moral import.

Penny's moral concerns, as we have seen, were already a major feature of his earliest exhibition works but, following the Academy's move to Somerset House, they became stronger still. Whilst in *The Profligate Punished* Penny's didactic purpose did not preclude an interest in comic incident redolent of Hogarth's graphic satires,

in his later works all such potentially vulgar elements had been carefully excluded or at least marginalised. Even the embracing couple who are relegated to a minor position in the background of *Lavinia Discovered Gleaning* are more boorish than comic and their presence is, moreover, justified by a specific textual reference. The underlying seriousness of these latest images was further amplified by Penny's use of an extraordinarily rich range of quotations from exemplary cultural and religious works. Renaissance and Baroque religious art, the classical landscapes of Poussin, Biblical stories and exegeses, and contemporary sermons were all skilfully woven into a subtle web of formal and iconographic allusions. For informed and patient viewers, these allusions confirmed wholeheartedly the appropriateness of Penny's images to the Academy's dignified new surroundings. The resulting combination of widely appealing, emphatically contemporary subject matter, expressive intensity, and serious moral purpose created a new and distinctive form of art that had no precise precedent or parallel in the exhibition space. With these 'sermons in paint', in other words, Penny had finally brought to an end the ceaseless experimentation of his earlier years and committed both his professional practice and his public identity to the role of 'ingenious moral painter'.

## CONCLUSION

Having worked in considerable detail through Penny's series of exhibition submissions during his years as the Royal Academy's Professor of Painting, we can now begin to piece together a coherent picture of an artist continually in search of a pictorial mode that would resolve the basic artistic problem posed by London's new public art exhibitions. On the one hand, an exhibition submission was expected to be a dignified and accomplished production, capable of meeting the central purpose that motivated the development of the art exhibition and, in due course, the Royal Academy itself: to raise the social, aesthetic and material status of British art and artists. On the other hand, the very medium of the exhibition ensured that this goal would be attained only if the works exhibited could, in some fairly straightforward and accessible way, give pleasure to the heterogeneous crowds who thronged the exhibition rooms. The challenge was to reconcile these two potentially conflicting desiderata.

In pursuit of his solution, Penny first submitted a series of pictures to the Academy's exhibitions that were hardly less varied than those he had submitted to the Society of Artists' exhibitions in the 1760s. At the first Academy exhibition of 1769, he exhibited *The Blacksmiths*. This painting was, in theme and treatment, more akin to the productions that would become characteristic of the Society of Artists' exhibitions than the emphatically classical works of the most celebrated of his fellow Academicians. *The Blacksmiths* was evidently well-received by 'the Connoisseurs' whose discussions were reported by the newspapers; but the painting's emphatically satirical intent and unabashed depiction of 'low' subject matter were by no means universally acceptable. Criticism focused especially on the ugliness of the 'nincompoop' tailor's and blacksmith's facial expressions. Either in response to these criticisms or due to a growing sense that such subject matter was simply not appropriate for the self-consciously dignified environment of the Academy, Penny never again exhibited a work in such an emphatically 'low' style. Instead, the following year, he produced a diametrically opposed form of art that, while no less emphatically 'British' in its Shakespearean subject matter, took his practice in a quite different, and markedly more conventional, direction. *Imogen Discovered in*

*the Cave* represented a far more self-consciously refined and sophisticated work than *The Blacksmiths*, or even the overtly theatrical portrayals of artists like Mortimer. Instead, it can be linked far more closely to Hayman's attempt to turn his Shakespearean scenes for Vauxhall Gardens and his illustrations for Hanmer's edition of Shakespeare into quasi-historical works. With *Imogen Discovered in the Cave*, then, Penny announced his willingness to pursue a distinctly 'British' brand of history painting.

*The Blacksmiths* and *Imogen Discovered in the Cave* can be seen as marking the two extremes of Penny's Academy practice – one concerned with 'low' everyday scenes and the other preoccupied with unabashedly 'high' literary and historical subjects. In neither case, though, was the 'lowness' or 'highness' of the subject the whole story of his exhibits. *The Blacksmiths* incorporates a vivid contemporary political message that, partly through happy coincidence, proved to have enormous topical relevance that gave his imagery a wide and sympathetic audience in the years following the 'Wilkes and Liberty' campaigns; it also had implicit links with Continental artistic practices, from Dutch genre painting through to the highly ambitious art of Velázquez. Even *Imogen Discovered in the Cave* possesses something of this dual quality, as it continued to evidence Penny's distinctive concern to work with accessible subject matter, in this case Garrick's recent and highly acclaimed production of the Shakespearean drama that was the artist's ultimate source.

In the following years, it was these hybrid qualities that were to become ever more important in Penny's art. In *Rosamond and Queen Eleanor*, we see Penny combining a historical and literary subject like that of *Imogen* with references to a far broader and more popular literary tradition. The recourse to a narrative that was rooted in popular ballads as well as in Addison's more rarefied operatic rendering, together with an antiquarian concern for representing 'ancient' details in dress and architecture, show the extent to which Penny was seeking to create a universal form of art. No less importantly, his simultaneous attempt to recapture the success of his earlier *Wolfe* and *Granby* in his extremely exacting and complex depiction of *Lord Clive Explaining the Situation of the Invalids to the Nabob* proved to be something of a failure, dragged down by its own internal contradictions and by the avalanche of invective that dogged Clive's later years. No doubt wounded by the controversy, Penny never again returned to this kind of depiction of martial virtue.

Rethinking his exhibition practice once more, Penny prepared two exceptionally complex and ambitious submissions in the years 1774 and 1776. For his first submission, *The Virtuous Comforted* and *The Profligate Punished*, Penny produced a quite remarkable feat of artistic synthesis. His starting point seems to have been popular prints that contrasted the satisfactions of a happy marriage with the discomforts of undisciplined bachelorhood. He then used this basic framework to return again to Dutch genre precedents, this time avoiding overtly ‘low’ subjects in favour of the ‘high’ genre models provided by Steen’s depictions of dissolute households, as well as the similarly refined depictions of physicians visiting *haut bourgeois* ladies, such as those of Toorenvliet. By deploying basic thematic and compositional elements from these sources and resolutely setting them in the contemporary world, Penny created a highly appealing ‘art of everyday life’ that also catered to the connoisseurs who were beginning to collect Dutch paintings in this period. He then used this refined but accessible form to develop the simple moral of the popular prints in a highly sophisticated way. Drawing on deeply rooted cultural stereotypes of dissolute masculinity and feminine virtue, Penny created a complex series of correspondences and consonances between his two works that together enabled them to operate as a ‘sermon in paint’. Virtuous femininity is opposed to corrupt masculinity, sobriety to drunkenness, marital love to heartless fornication, carelessness to exactitude, thievish disrespect to humble dutifulness, and sympathy to neglectful indifference. The resulting images were highly successful in their own time, being singled out for praise not only in contemporary press criticism but in the private correspondence of Sir Joshua Reynolds himself.<sup>412</sup> Yet such success still seems to have left Penny thirsting for achievement in the field of true historical painting. Thus, we find him taking for his next submission another highly popular literary subject, *Jane Shore Led to Do Penance*. This was to be the most comprehensive attempt of his entire career at an accurate depiction of a historical scene, with both costume and location carefully derived from antique sources. At the same time, however, Penny again used his subject as an opportunity to comment on contemporary events, but this time for moralising, rather than merely political, ends. He clearly intended his historical scene to be a plea for the humane treatment of poor

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<sup>412</sup> ‘The Pictures of Dance, Cipriani and Penny are superior to any they have done before...’; Sir Joshua Reynolds to Thomas, 2<sup>nd</sup> Baron Grantham, 2 May 1774, in John Ingamells and John Edgcumbe (eds), *The Letters of Sir Joshua Reynolds* (New Haven, 2000), p. 51.

prostitutes, then being subjected to the full force of the law under the influence of Constable William Payne. In contrast to the success of *The Virtuous Comforted* and *The Profligate Punished*, however, this work received little notice from the critics and was one of the few exhibition works by the artist never to be engraved.

It was presumably *Jane Shore*'s lack of public and critical success that led Penny to finally abandon his attempts at historical painting and return again to the overtly moralised representations of everyday life that had proved so successful in his 1774 pairing. It was at this point that Penny seems to have recognised that in such works he had found a cohesive, highly replicable solution to the exhibition problem. With this realisation, he now felt able to commit himself to a stable public and artistic identity as the 'ingenious moral painter'. In his 1780 Academy submission, *A Boy Taken Out of the Water Drowned* and *The Boy by Proper Means Recovered*, Penny recapitulated many of the key features of *The Virtuous Comforted* and *The Profligate Punished*. These latest works again comprised a highly accessible and appealing pair of contrasted works, firmly set in the contemporary world. This time, the setting was derived from contemporary depictions of rural life rather than Dutch genre painting, but the essential concerns were much the same. Accurate, 'truthful' representation of deeply felt emotions was used to promote the cause of virtue and reform, creating a literal 'sermon in paint' intended to publicise the philanthropic goals of the Humane Society. Once again, moreover, a more complex set of artistic references could be detected beneath the apparently straightforward and sentimental storyline, this time drawing on Italian religious imagery. Penny's next submission, *Lavinia Discovered Gleaning*, also made use of a similarly affecting scene from contemporary life to convey a more complex moral message. Based on an episode from a popular literary classic that was usually presented in far more escapist and otherworldly terms, Penny took a markedly different approach that conformed to his increasingly stable artistic practice. Once again, the artist rethought earlier renditions of the subject to bring out an underlying moral message implicit within the original poem. The principal figures, Palemon and Lavinia, were transformed into emblems of their virtuous feelings – of gratitude and modesty respectively – rather than simply being cast as appealing literary characters.

This, then, was Penny's enduring solution to the exhibition problem: accessible, affecting portrayals of ordinary individuals, rich and poor, virtuous and not-so-

virtuous, in domestic and, later, rural settings, who became the vehicle for events and emotions of clear moral significance. And, as if to confirm the degree to which he had committed himself to this approach, the artist, for the first time in his career, maintained an unbroken succession of such works into the following year, 1782. In that year he exhibited three paintings featuring overtly affecting and moralised subjects: another pair of contrasted images, depicting the very different conduct of *The Benevolent Physician* and *The Rapacious Quack* (figs 112 and 113), together with a scene of benevolent rescue in a rural setting, *Widow Costard's Cow and Goods, Distraigned for Taxes, are Redeemed by the Generosity of Johnny Pearmain* (fig. 114). In the first image from his pairing, we find a soberly dressed physician refusing to take a fee for treating the child of a prosperous-looking artistic family. In its companion piece, we find a heart-rending depiction of a poor countrywoman being forced to surrender the food which she needs to feed her children to settle the bill of an extravagantly dressed doctor who, it seems, has failed to cure her sick son. Once again, Penny has used vivid depictions of familiar social types in everyday surroundings to convey a straightforward moral message about the importance of benevolent conduct.

In *Widow Costard's Cow and Goods*, we find a similarly edifying moral tale. To the right we see the old widow. A frail and diminutive figure, she sits with her head bowed submissively, her arms folded limply in her lap and her feet pressed defensively together. Her expression is one of utter dejection and desolation; staring blankly into the distance she appears to be barely conscious of the events taking place around her. Standing beside her we see the forbidding figure of a bailiff, whose assistant has seized the meagre contents of her cottage as well as the cow upon which she clearly depends both for sustenance and for the modest income that dairying can bring. Finally, we see the figure of Johnny Pearmain, who in almost every outward respect forms a pattern of oppositions with the figure of the widow: wealth in place of poverty; youth in place of age; confidence in place of fear; and urbane refinement in place of rustic simplicity. Evidently moved by her plight, he reaches into his pocket to pay off the old widow's debts, ensuring that she can continue to maintain her modest livelihood. As with his other moral works, it is the unflinching accuracy of Penny's portrayal of poverty and distress, as well as of generosity and sympathy, that is the most striking and unusual feature of his

painting. By presenting his scene in such immediate terms, Penny clearly sought to create a work that would prove accessible to a wide audience whilst also fulfilling an unimpeachable moral purpose.

Penny's model of painting was received in precisely these terms by his contemporaries. If we take the critiques published in 1782 alone, we find in the *Gazetteer* that 'The character of this artist, as a *moral painter*, has already been justly established'. According to the critic of *The London Courant*, 'This gentleman tells a tale of woe admirably; and is as likely to do good, thereby, as many clergyman by their exertions in the pulpit'. Penny's *Widow Costard's Cow and Goods*, meanwhile, was hailed as 'an excellent moral lesson'. Consistently, it was the moral aspect of Penny's work that commended it to contemporary critics. It was this that made Penny's notably accurate delineations of ordinary people in everyday situations broadly acceptable. Sometimes lauded as 'truthfulness', a process of 'research after nature', such verisimilitude and straightforwardness could also, however, attract criticism for being 'void of all choice' or being 'unornamented'. But it is surely the former judgment that captures more accurately Penny's artistic purposes. Indeed, close analysis shows that his works are deeply considered and far more complex in their range of reference and allusion than they might at first sight appear. Within the broad framework of what has since come to be called genre painting, we find Penny pursuing an artistic approach notable for its depth of learning and its lofty purposes. Far from being simple sentimental images, Penny's works combined meticulous observation of the contemporary world with a wealth of carefully researched pictorial reference, ranging from the most esteemed Old Master paintings through to native antiquarian sources, popular print culture and the modern British productions of artists like Francis Hayman and William Hogarth. This was truly intended to be an art form worthy of the moral and national purposes of the new Academy, a genuinely scholarly approach to exhibition painting.

The real significance of this kind of painting, as well as the extent to which it successfully resolved the exhibition problem, can be seen in its remarkable afterlife. Penny's example was followed by a whole series of exhibition painters who presented scenes of everyday life that were redeemed by a touching moral purpose. The first was Penny's own pupil, William Redmore Bigg, who redeployed many of the key features of his master's work until his death in 1828. His first work of this

kind, *Schoolboys Giving Charity to a Blind Man*, was exhibited in 1780 (fig. 115), and his next, *A Lady and Her Children Relieving a Cottager* (fig. 116), in the following year. These works typify the artist's output, showing how he developed a softer and more polished way of treating what was, fundamentally, the same subject matter as Penny's. The scrupulously accurate rendition of costume and physique is an especially striking shared feature of their work. From Bigg, as Solkin has observed, this approach was taken up and further adapted by George Morland and, in a still more polished form, by Francis Wheatley. Morland regularly repeated paired images of the kind introduced to the exhibition arena by Penny. Contrasted households were a particularly favoured theme: *The Comforts of Industry* and *The Miseries of Idleness* represented here by engravings of 1790 (figs 117 and 118), were only one instance of several versions of Penny's virtuous and profligate households. Bigg's influence on Wheatley is very evident in one of the latter's most famous images, *The Benevolent Cottager*, best known from the engraving by William Nutter published in 1788 (fig. 119). The parallels are not simply thematic, as the old man receiving food from the young woman was evidently derived, with remarkably literalness, from Bigg's blind man.

Perhaps most striking, however, is the important impact that Penny's example appears to have had on the work of David Wilkie. As Solkin has observed, Wilkie's *Village Politicians* (fig. 120) of 1806 initiated a dramatic change in the style of genre paintings exhibited at the Academy.<sup>413</sup> No longer justified by the same kind of exemplary moral that we see in Penny's later work or that of Bigg, Morland and Wheatley, Wilkie's most celebrated work has generally been seen as its polar opposite. In place of the softened sentimentality of Penny's successors, we find a relatively unvarnished portrait of 'low' life and manners. From this point onwards, such subject matter became a desirable and even commonplace feature of the Academy exhibitions, leading Solkin to describe Wilkie's work as the 'Trojan horse' of British genre painting.<sup>414</sup> What appears to have gone completely unremarked, however, is the combination of thematic and – in the case of one key figure – formal resemblance between Wilkie's work and Penny's *The Blacksmiths*. Both depict the disruptive effects of working class involvement in politics from a basically

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<sup>413</sup> David H. Solkin, 'Crowds and Connoisseurs: Looking at Genre Painting at Somerset House', in *idem* (ed.), *Art on the Line*, p. 160.

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid.*

conservative standpoint; and the incredulous expression of Wilkie's two central figures – particularly the standing figure wearing the Tam O'Shanter cap – would seem to betray direct borrowing from Penny's blacksmith, as he receives the tailor's news. Indeed, Penny's earlier work exhibits many of the features that Wilkie would later reintroduce to British genre painting, notably its indebtedness to seventeenth-century Dutch precedents, its willingness to show subjects of varied social and economic classes, and its close attention to emotional states. Is it too much to imagine that the germ of Wilkie's idea for this painting was planted when he came to London in 1805 and registered in the Academy schools? It is not, after all, improbable that he would have come across the print of Penny's work at this time.

Whether or not this was the case, in remarkable ways Penny anticipated what would become one of the dominant forms of exhibition painting in the nineteenth century, a form that would greatly exceed in popularity and influence the 'grand manner' historical works that had initially dominated the Academy's displays. Indeed, Penny's ingenious use of such everyday scenes to promote impeccably moral ends can reasonably be seen as the true Trojan horse of British genre painting. Licensed by such elevated purposes, artists were freed to represent subject matter that would otherwise have appeared too humble or incongruous to take their place in the elevated environment of the Academy's exhibitions. From the 1780s onwards, such works were, in one form or another, a constant feature of the exhibition-goer's experience. This no doubt reflects the capacity of this kind of art to satisfy an unprecedentedly broad and varied range of exhibition visitors, from the discerning connoisseurs to the simplest middle-class spectators. Whilst Penny was soon to be eclipsed by his successors, it is surely not too much to see in his work the direct forerunner of the kind of painting that showed how

...particular appearances might be made to yield truths of general importance; how representations of the lowest orders of humanity could be fashioned into vehicles for the 'highest' morality; and how the portrayal of private, 'familiar life' could be raised to the levels of public significance associated with heroes, and with history.<sup>415</sup>

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<sup>415</sup> Solkin, *Painting Out of the Ordinary*, p. 39.

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**The ‘Ingenious Moral Painter’:  
Edward Penny, the Royal Academy  
and the Reinvention of Genre Painting  
1768-1782**

Two Volumes

**VOLUME TWO**

Illustrations

Lucinda Abigail Lax

Submitted for the degree of PhD

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Department of History of Art

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Fig. 1 Marco Benefial, *Visione di santa Caterina Fieschi*, 1737, oil on canvas, 78  $\frac{1}{3}$   $\times$  116  $\frac{1}{2}$  in,  
Galleria Nazionale de Arte Antica Palazzo Corsini, Rome



Fig. 2 Edward Penny, *Cardinal Guido Bentivoglio*, After Sir Anthony Van Dyck, 1741, oil on canvas, 77  $\frac{1}{8}$   $\times$  57  $\frac{1}{8}$  in, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford



Fig. 3 Edward Penny, *William Farrington*, 1744, oil on canvas,  
30 × 24 7/8 in, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool



Fig. 4 Edward Penny, *Lady Anne Whitmore*, 1757, oil on canvas,  
50  $\frac{3}{8}$   $\times$  40  $\frac{1}{8}$  in, Harveian Society of London



Fig. 5 Edward Penny, *David Garrick at his Country Seat, Hampstead*, 1756, oil on canvas, 35 × 27 in, location unknown



Fig. 6 Edward Penny, *Self-Portrait*, 1759, oil on canvas,  
33  $\frac{1}{8}$  × 26  $\frac{7}{8}$  in, Royal Academy of Arts, London



Fig. 7 Edward Penny, *A Scene from 'Jane Shore'*, 1762, oil on canvas,  
24 ¼ × 29 ½ in, location unknown



Fig. 8 Edward Penny, *The Death of General Wolfe*, 1763, oil on canvas,  
39 ½ × 49 ½ in, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford



Fig. 9 Edward Penny, *A Scene Taken from Swift's 'Description of a City Shower'*, 1764, oil on canvas, 29 ¼ × 24 ¼ in, Museum of London



Fig. 10 Edward Penny, *The Marquis of Granby Relieving a Sick Soldier*, 1764, oil on canvas, 40 × 50 in, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford



Fig. 11 Edward Penny, *The Return from a Fair*, 1765, oil on canvas, 31 × 28 in, location unknown





Fig. 13 Edward Penny, *The Blacksmiths*, 1769, oil on canvas, 48  $\frac{3}{4}$   $\times$  38  $\frac{3}{4}$  in, Tate Gallery, London

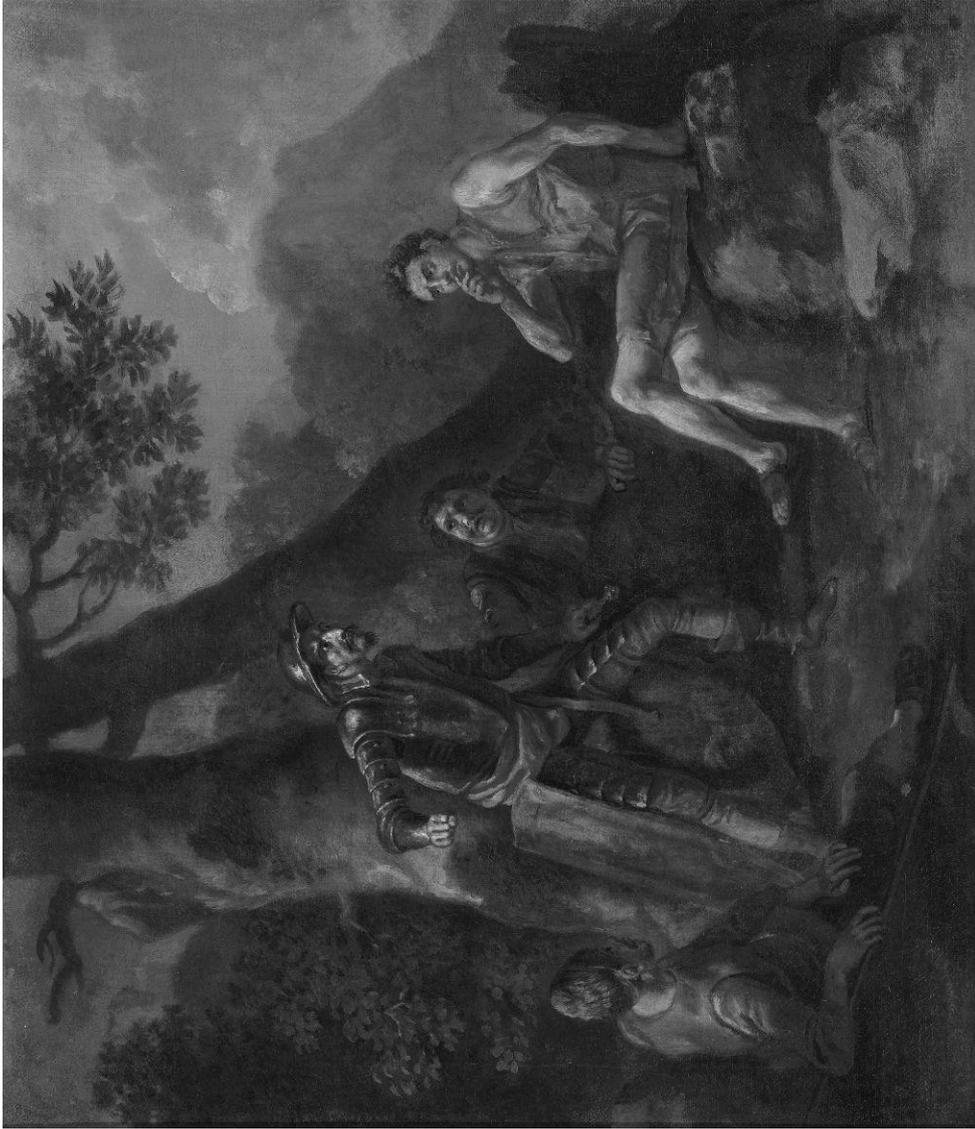


Fig. 14 Francis Hayman, *Don Quixote Disputing with the Mad Cardenio*, late 1760s, oil on canvas, 20  $\frac{5}{8}$   $\times$  24  $\frac{3}{4}$  in, Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter

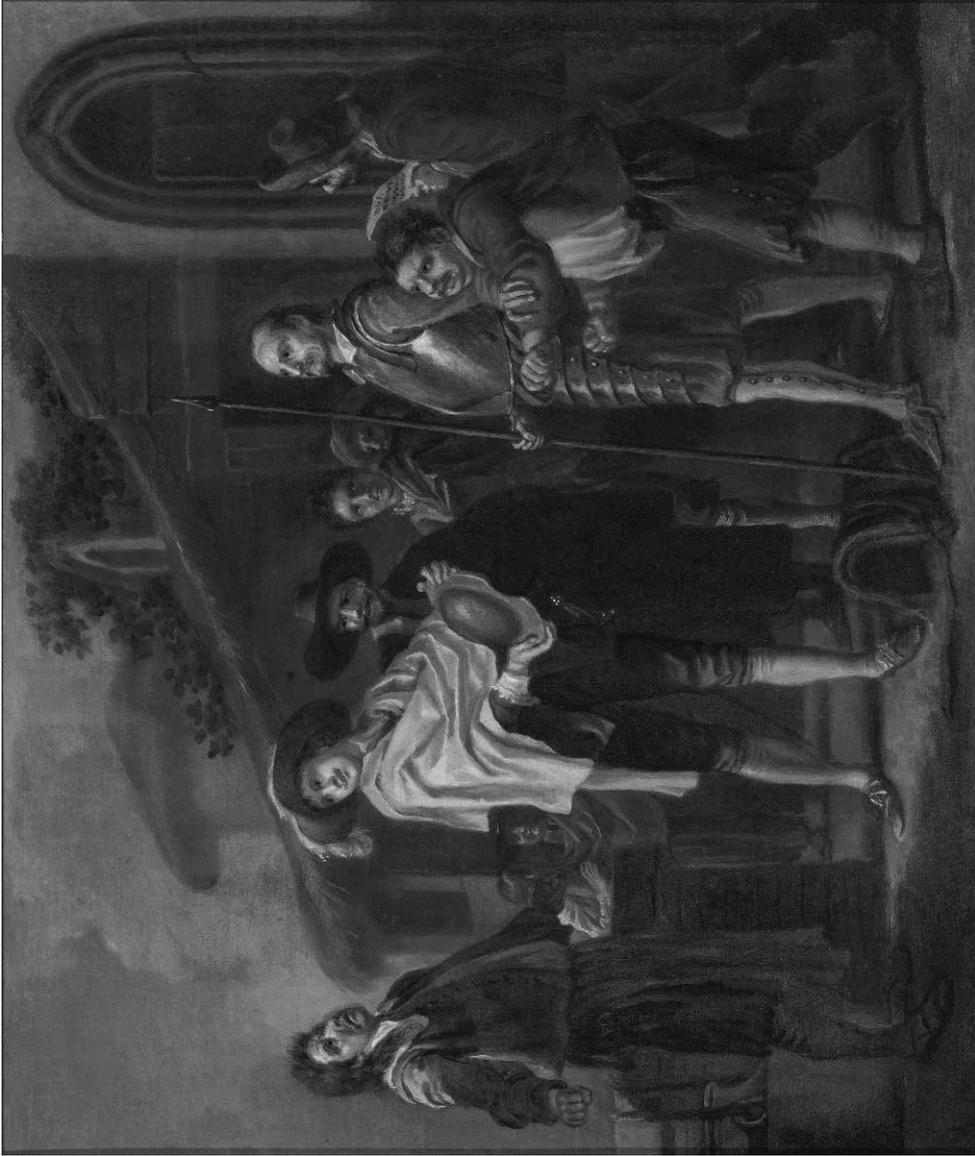


Fig. 15 Francis Hayman, *The Barber Reclaiming His Basin from Don Quixote*, late 1760s, oil on canvas, 20  $\frac{5}{8}$   $\times$  24  $\frac{3}{4}$  in, Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter



Fig. 16 Jan van Vliet, *The Blacksmiths*, 1635, etching and engraving, 8 ¼ × 6 in, British Museum, London

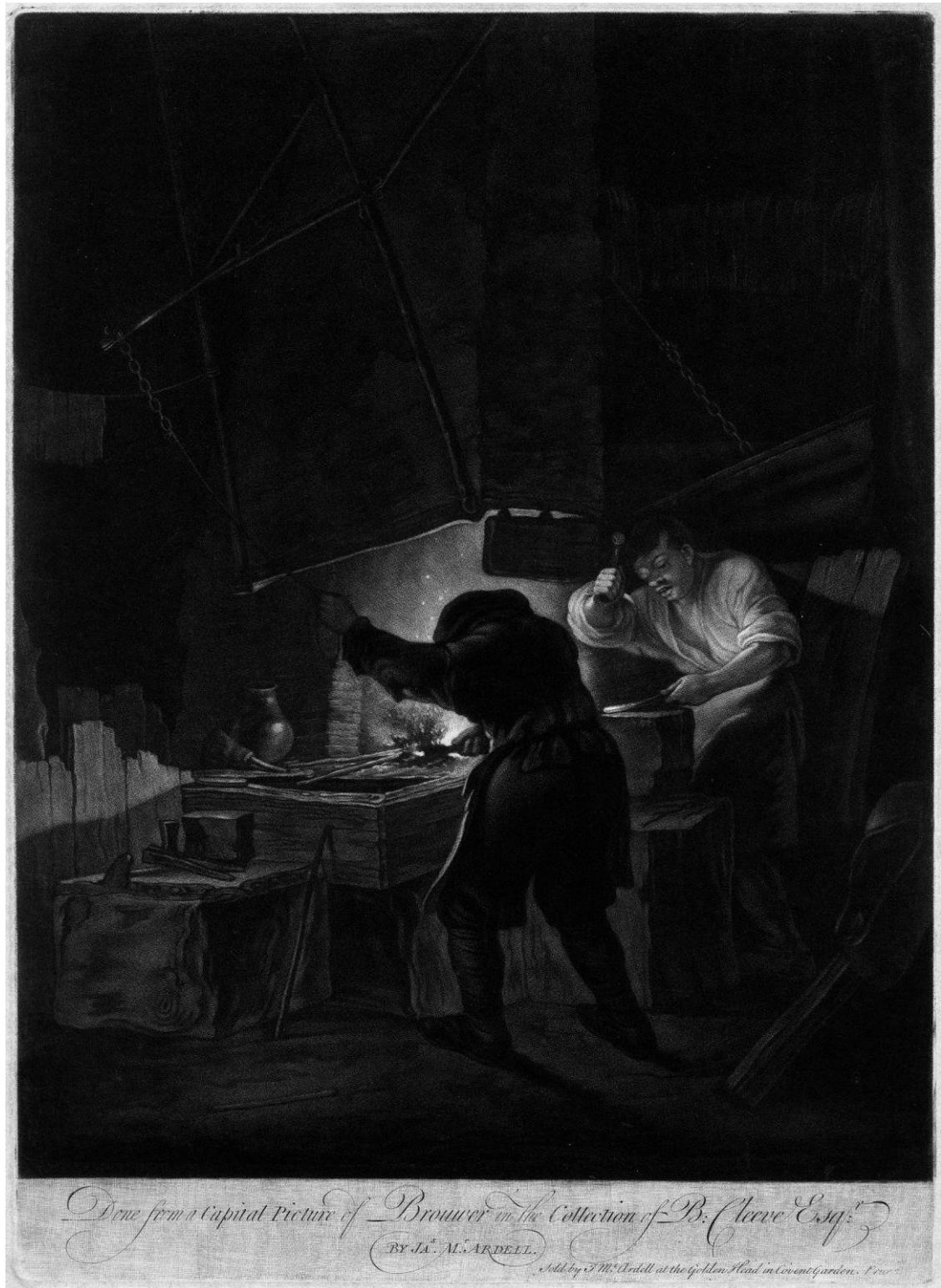


Fig. 17 James McArdell after Adriaen Brouwer, *The Blacksmith's Forge*, c.1755-65, mezzotint, 14 ½ × 10 ½ in, British Museum, London



Fig. 18 Joseph Wright of Derby, *Three Persons Viewing the Gladiator by Candlelight*, 1765, oil on canvas, 40 × 48 in, Private Collection



Fig. 19 Henry Robert Morland, *A Housemaid by Candlelight*, 1765, pastel on paper, 37 ½ × 30 ¼ in, location unknown



Fig. 20 Edward Penny, Study for *The Blacksmiths*, 1767, oil on canvas, 20 × 17 in, location unknown



Fig. 21 Hubert Gravelot after Francis Hayman, *King John* (Act 5, Scene 9), illustration to Thomas Hanmer's *The Works of Shakespear*, 1743-44 (6 vols), vol. 3, General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University



Fig. 22 John Hamilton Mortimer, *A Scene from King John (Act 5, Scene 3)*, 1768, oil on canvas, 39  $\frac{3}{4}$   $\times$  50 in, The Garrick Club, London



Fig. 23 William Hogarth, *Beer Street*, published 1 February 1751, etching and engraving, 14  $\frac{1}{8}$   $\times$  12 in, British Museum, London



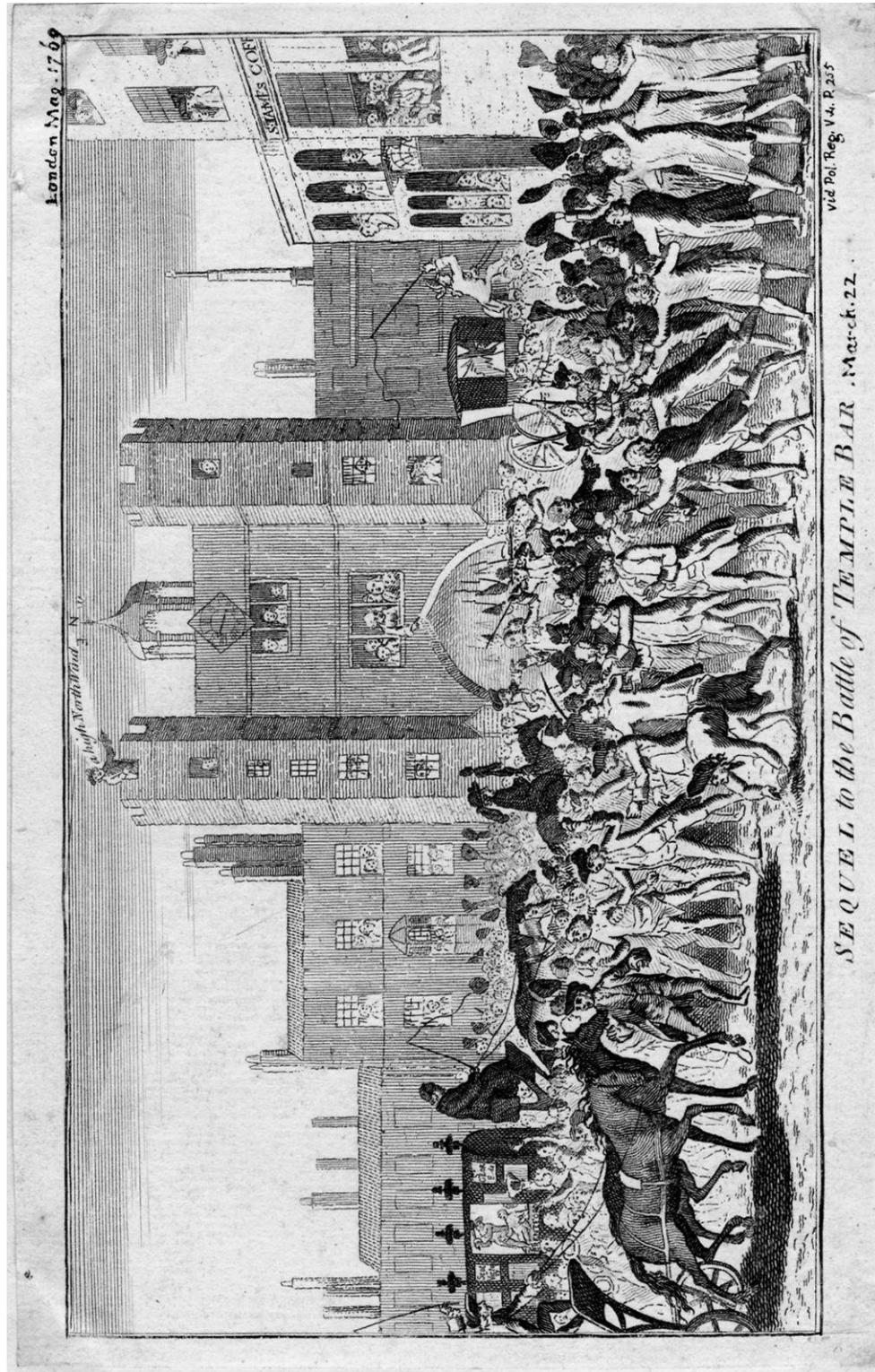


Fig. 25 Anon., *Sequel to the Battle of Temple Bar*, published in the *London Magazine*, March 1769, etching and engraving,  $4 \frac{3}{8} \times 7 \frac{1}{2}$  in, British Museum, London



Fig. 26 Bartholomew Warren, *St. Monday*, frontispiece to the 1764 edition of Thomas Legg's *Low-Life* (1755)

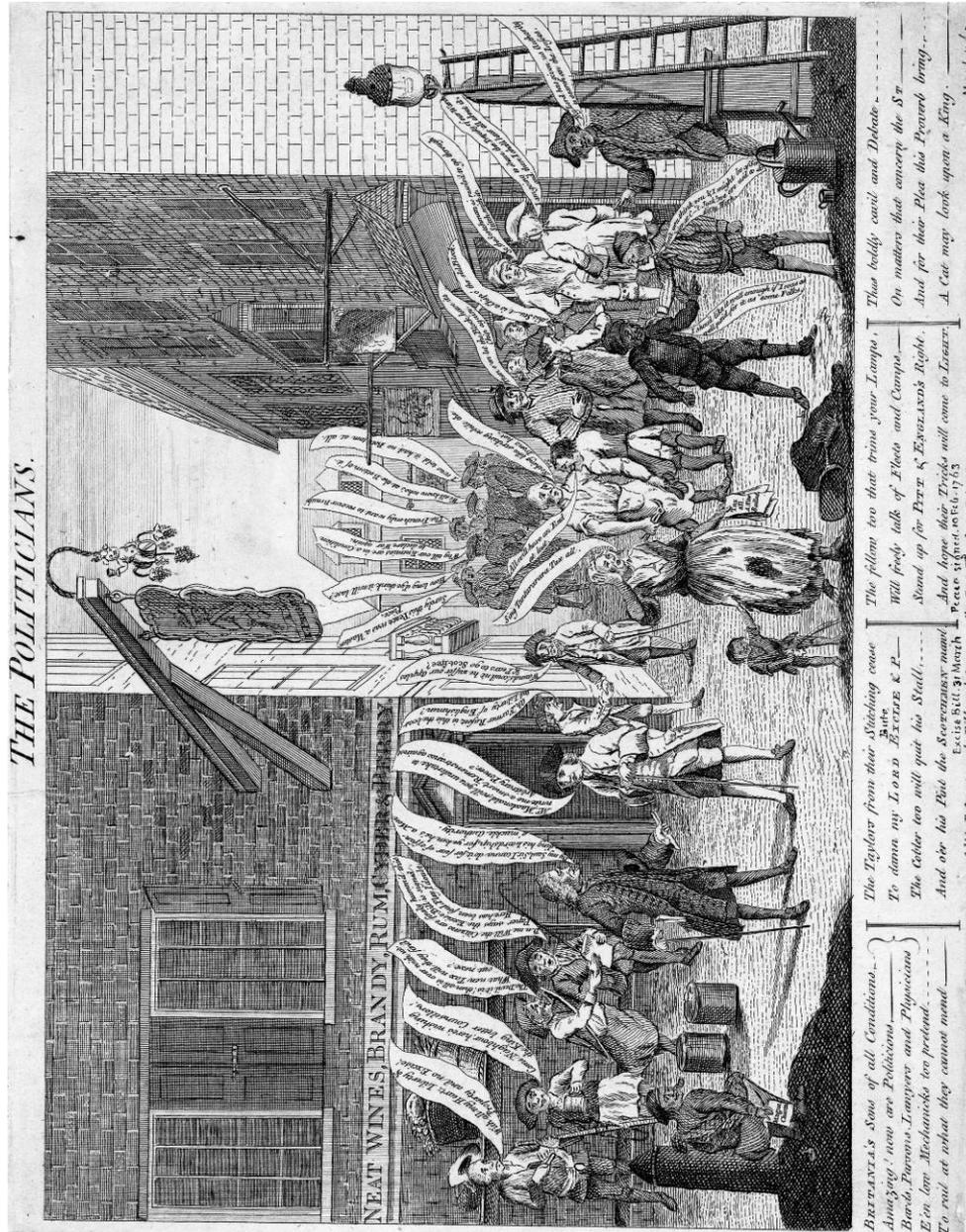


Fig. 27 Anon., *The Politicians*, c.1763, etching, 9 3/8 x 12 1/8 in, British Museum, London

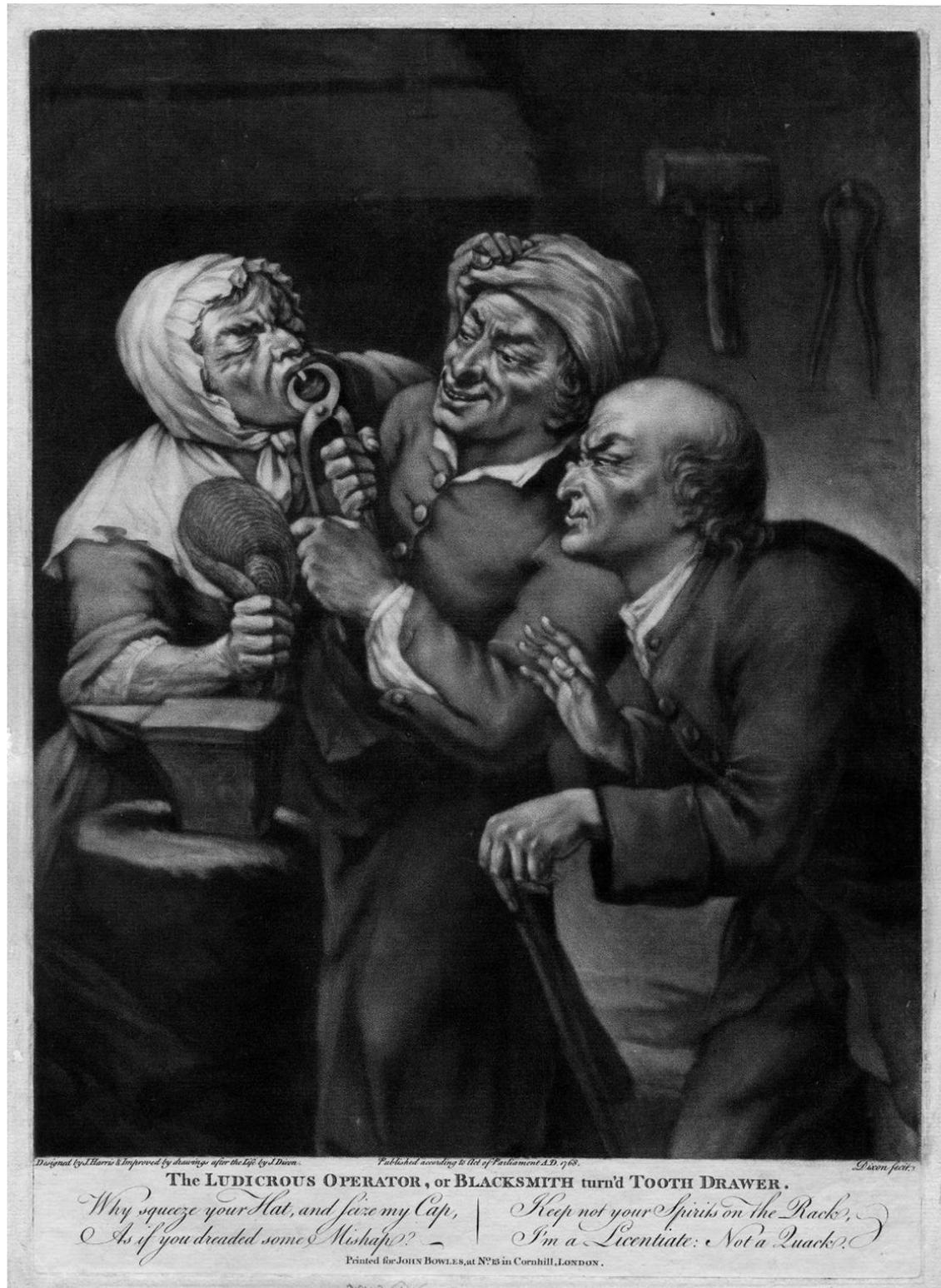


Fig. 28 John Dixon after John Harris [?], *The Ludicrous Operator, or Blacksmith Turn'd Tooth Drawer*, 1768, mezzotint, 13  $\frac{7}{8}$   $\times$  9  $\frac{7}{8}$  in, British Museum, London



Fig. 29 Thomas Stayner after John Colletti, A Taylor Riding to Brentford, c.1768, engraving, 9 1/4 x 14 in, British Museum, London

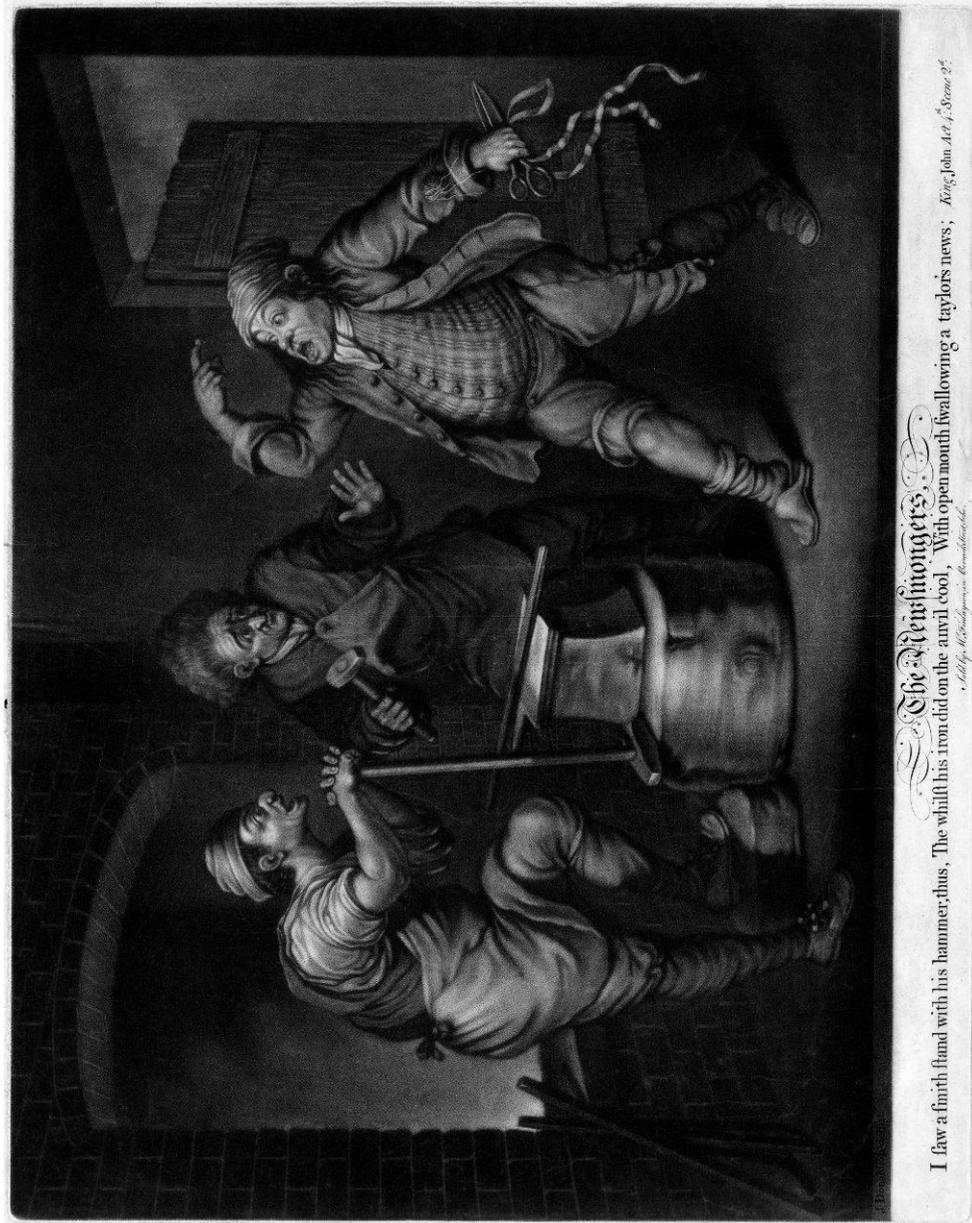


Fig. 30 John Finlayson after John Donaldson, *The Newsmongers*, published 1 May 1769, mezzotint, 14 × 17 7/8 in, British Museum, London

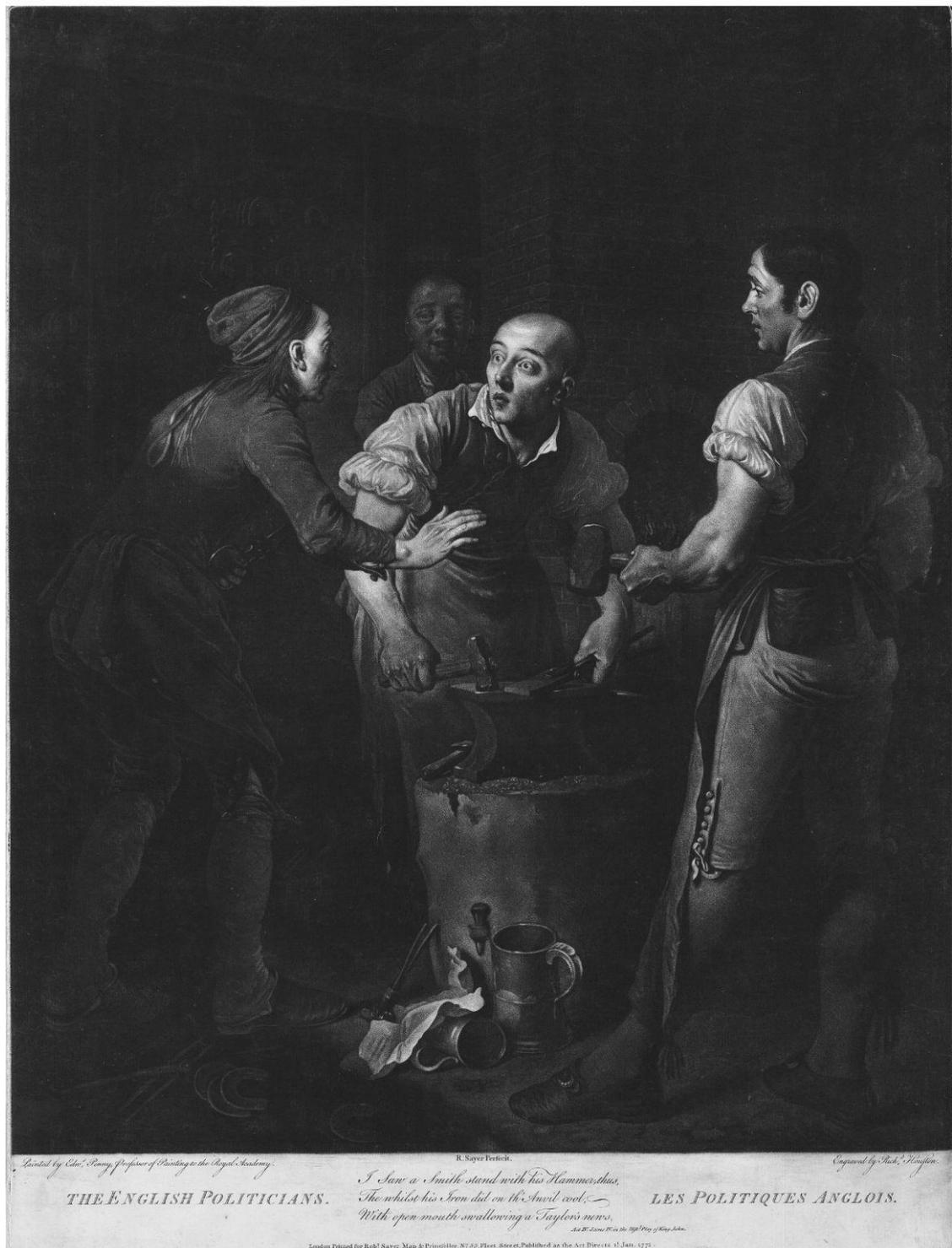


Fig. 31 Richard Houston after Edward Penny, *The English Politicians*, published 1 January 1771, mezzotint, 23  $\frac{7}{8}$  × 18 in, British Museum, London



Fig. 32 Anon., *The Blacksmith Lets His Iron Grow Cold Attending to the Taylor's News*, illustration from the *Oxford Magazine*, or *Universal Museum*, vol. 8, June 1772

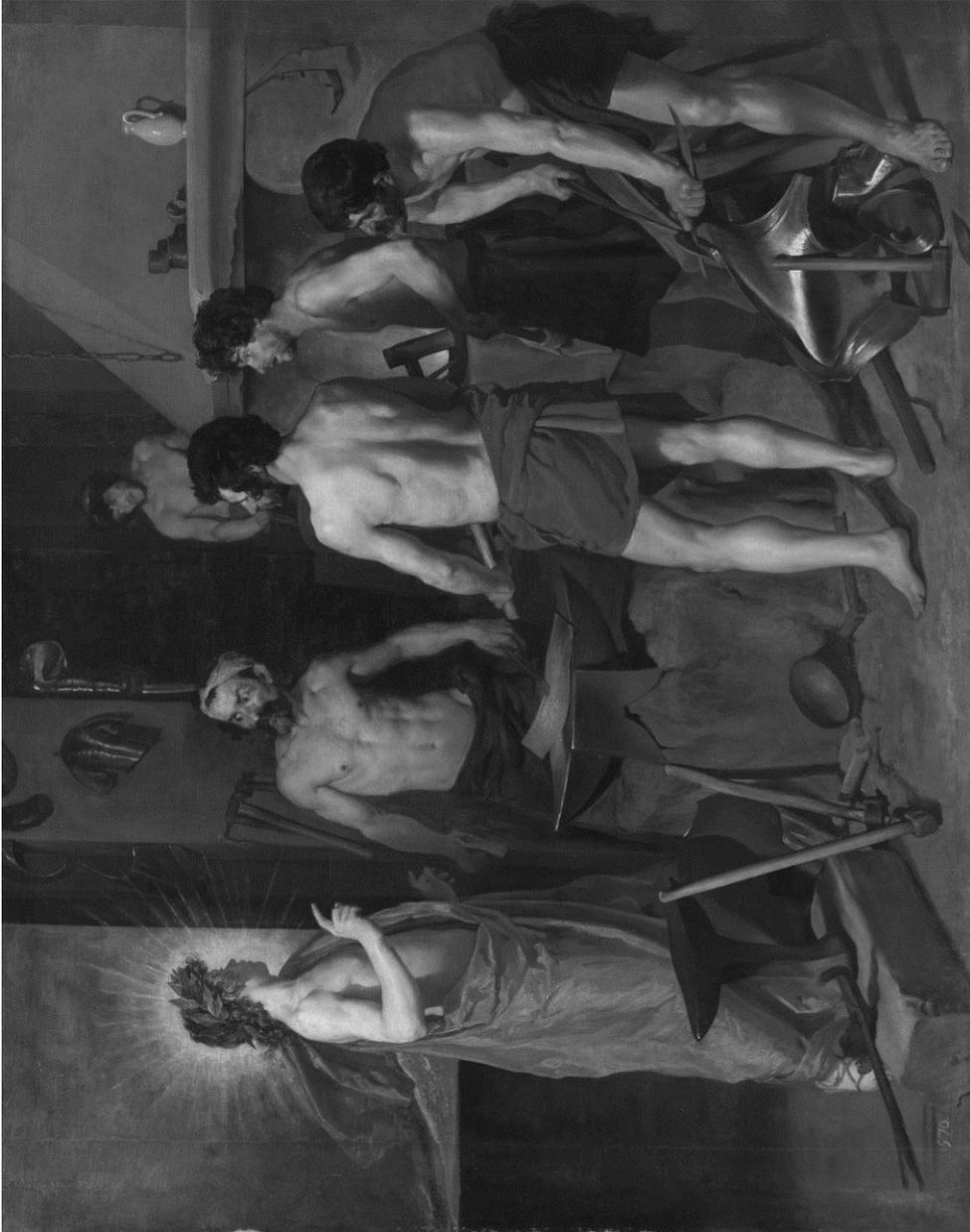


Fig. 33 Diego de Silva y Velázquez, *The Forge of Vulcan*, c.1630, oil on canvas, 87  $\frac{3}{4}$   $\times$  114  $\frac{1}{4}$  in, Museo del Prado, Madrid



Fig. 34 Edward Penny, *Imogen Discovered in the Cave* (*Cymbeline*, Act 3, Scene 6), 1770, oil on canvas, 54 ½ × 60 ¼ in, Royal Shakespeare Theatre Picture Gallery, Stratford



Fig. 35 Valentine Green after Robert Edge Pine, *Mr Reddish in the Character of Posthumus in Cymbeline (Act 5, Scene 4)*, published 15 November 1771, mezzotint, 24 × 15 ½ in, British Museum, London



Fig. 36 Hubert Gravelot after Francis Hayman, *Cymbeline* (Act 3, Scene 7), illustration to Thomas Hanmer's *The Works of Shakespear*, 1743-44 (6 vols), vol. 6, General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University



Fig. 37 Joseph Wright of Derby, *A Philosopher by Lamplight*, 1769, oil on canvas, 50 ½ × 40½ in, Derby Museums and Art Gallery



Fig. 38 Pompeo Batoni, *Charles Compton, Seventh Earl of Northampton*, 1758, oil on canvas, 93 ½ × 58 ⅞ in, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge



Fig. 39 Angelica Kauffman, *Venus Showing Aeneas and Achates the Way to Carthage*, 1768, oil on canvas, 49  $\frac{5}{8}$   $\times$  40  $\frac{1}{8}$  in, The National Trust, Saltram House, Devon

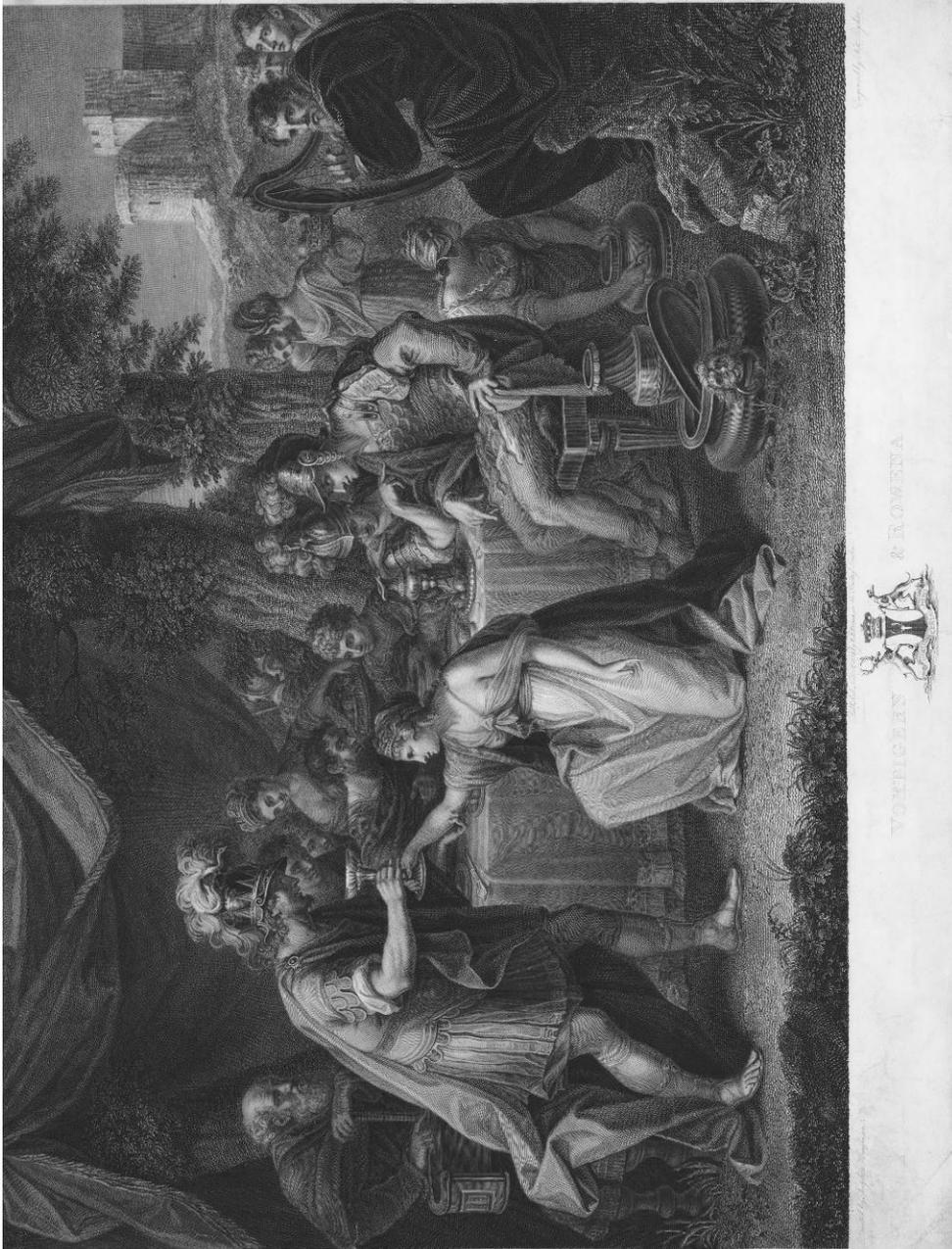


Fig. 40 Thomas Ryder after Angelica Kauffman, *Vortigern and Rowena*, c.1803, engraving, 19  $\frac{1}{4}$   $\times$  24  $\frac{5}{8}$  in, British Museum, London



Fig. 41 Joshua Reynolds, *Colonel Acland and Lord Sydney: The Archers*, 1769, oil on canvas, 93 × 70 ¾ in, Private Collection



Fig. 42 Johann Zoffany, *The Academicians of the Royal Academy*, 1771-72,  
oil on canvas, 40 × 58 in, Royal Collection, London



Fig. 43 John Raphael Smith after Edward Penny, *Rosamond and Queen Eleanor*, published 1 June 1774, mezzotint, 9 × 7 in, British Museum, London



Fig. 44 Charles Grignion after Francis Hayman, *Rosamond and Queen Eleanor*, illustration to the first volume of J. and R. Tonson's *The Works of the Late Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.* (4 vols), 1761



The Life and Death of  
**Fair ROSAMOND.**  
*King HENRY the Second's Concubine,*



WHEN as king Henry rul'd this land,  
 The second of that name,  
 Beside the queen he loved dear,  
 A fair and comely dame,  
 Most peerless was her beauty found,  
 Her favour and her face;  
 A sweeter creature in the world,  
 Could never prince embrace.  
 Her crisped locks like threads of gold  
 Appear'd to each man's sight,  
 Her comely eyes like orient pearl,  
 Did cast a heavenly light.  
 The blood within her crystal cheeks  
 Did such a colour drive,  
 As tho' the lily and the rose  
 For mastery did strive.  
 Fair Rosamond, Fair Rosamond,  
 Her name was call'd so,  
 To whom dame Eleanor our Queen,  
 Was known a deadly foe.

The king therefore, for her defence,  
 Against the furious queen,  
 At Woodstock builded such a bower,  
 The like was never seen.  
 Most curiously that bower was built  
 Of stone and timber strong,  
 An hundred and fifty doors  
 Did to this bower belong.  
 And they so cunningly contriv'd,  
 With turnings round about,  
 That none without a clue of thread  
 Could enter in and out.  
 Now for his love and lady's sake,  
 Who was both fair and bright,  
 The keeping of this bower he gave  
 Unto a valiant Knight.  
 But fortune that doth often frown  
 Where it before did smile,  
 The king's delight, the lady's joy  
 Full soon she did beguile.

Fig. 46 Anon., *The Life and Death of Fair Rosamond,*  
*King Henry the Second's Concubine,* 1750

THE  
 LIFE and DEATH  
 OF  
 Fair ROSAMOND,  
 CONCUBINE to  
 King HENRY the Second;  
 Shewing her being poisoned by  
 Queen ELEANOR.



Printed and Sold in Aldermary Church-  
 Yard, Bow Lane, London.

Fig. 47 Anon., title page to *The Life and Death of Fair Rosamond, Concubine to King Henry the Second; Shewing Her Being Poisoned by Queen Eleanor*, 1760



Fig. 48 Gerard van der Gucht, *Rosamond and Queen Eleanor*, illustration to the fourth volume of *A Select Collection of Novels and Histories* (6 vols), 1729



Fig. 49 James Watson after Joshua Reynolds, *The Children in the Wood*, published 2 June 1772, mezzotint (first state), 14  $\frac{7}{8}$  × 11  $\frac{5}{8}$  in, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Fund



Fig. 50 Edward Penny, *Lord Clive Explaining to the Nabob the Situation of the Invalids in India*, 1772, oil on canvas, 54 × 48 in, India Office Collections, British Library, London

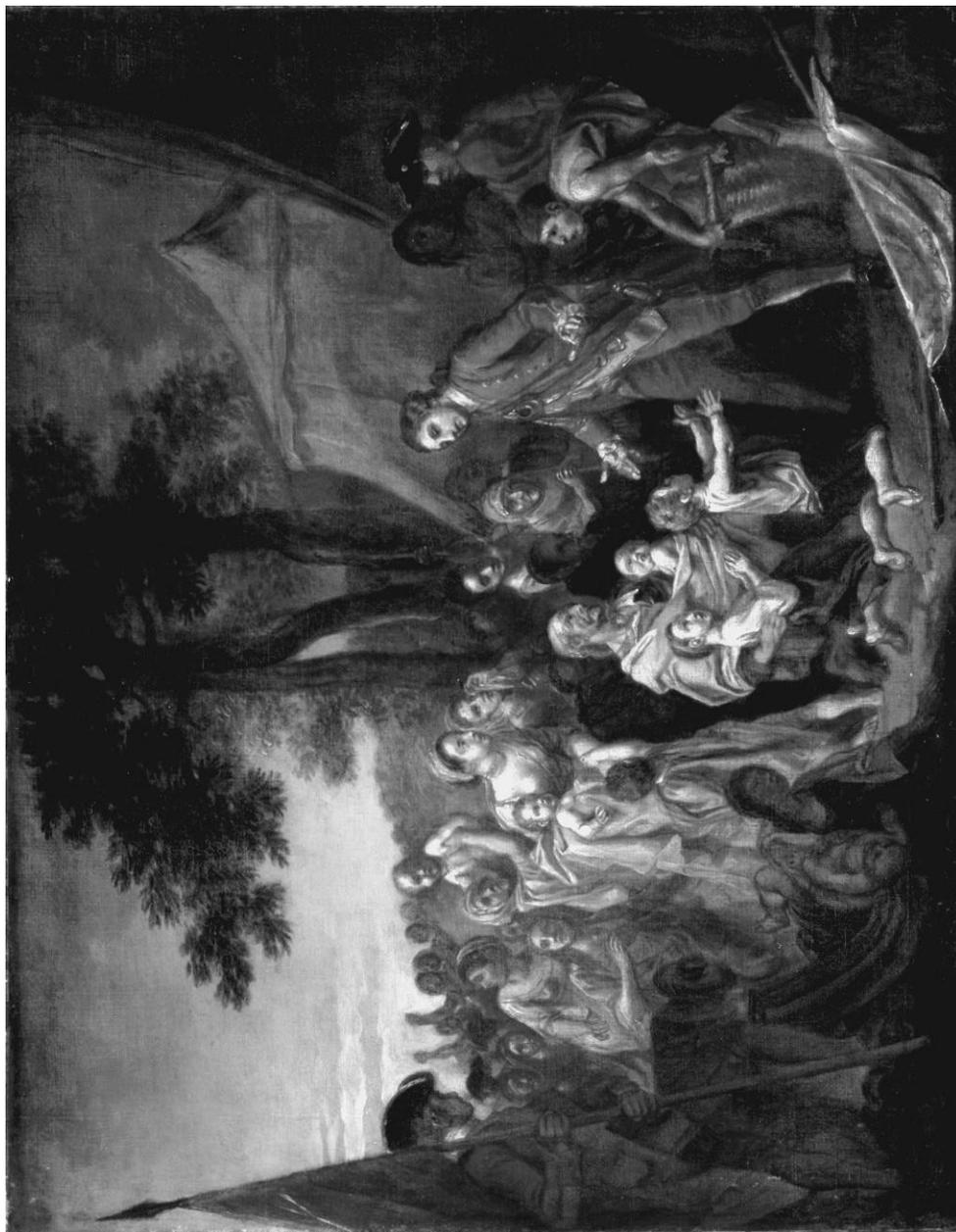


Fig. 51 Francis Hayman, Modello for *The Humanity of General Amherst*, 1760-61, oil on canvas, 27  $\frac{7}{8}$   $\times$  36 in, Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton, New Brunswick, Gift of The Beaverbrook Foundation



Fig. 52 Francis Hayman, *Modello for Robert Clive Meeting Mir Jafar After the Battle of Plassey, 1757*, c.1761-62, oil on canvas, 40 × 50 in, National Portrait Gallery, London



Fig. 53 Peter Scheemakers, *Robert, Lord Clive*, c.1764, marble, 66 inches high, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Whitehall, London



Fig. 54 Charles Clive, *Robert, Lord Clive*, 1764, oil on canvas, 80 × 60 in, Shrewsbury Museum and Art Gallery

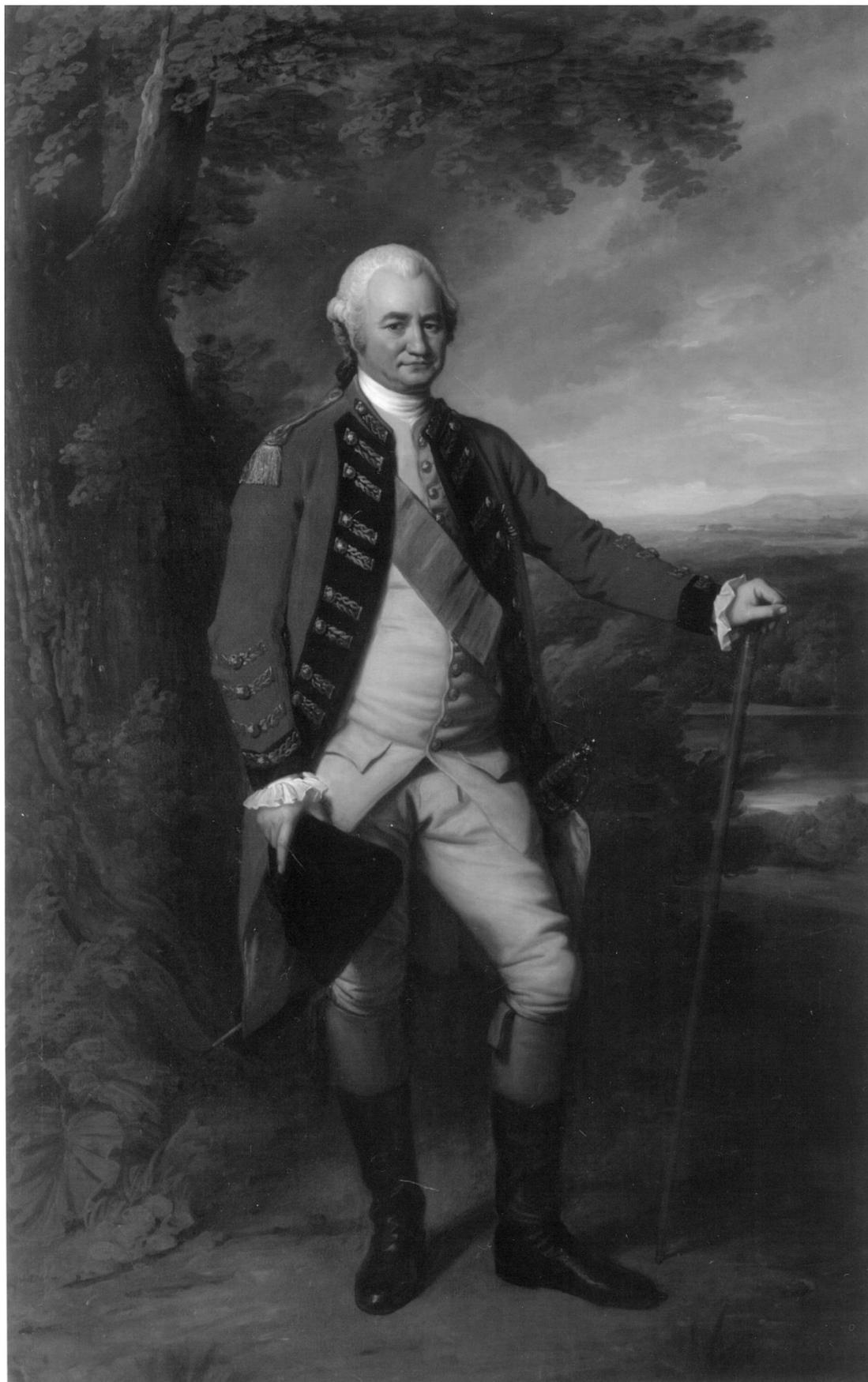


Fig. 55 Nathaniel Dance, *Robert, Lord Clive*, c.1770, oil on canvas, 80 × 60 in, The National Trust, Powis Castle, Wales

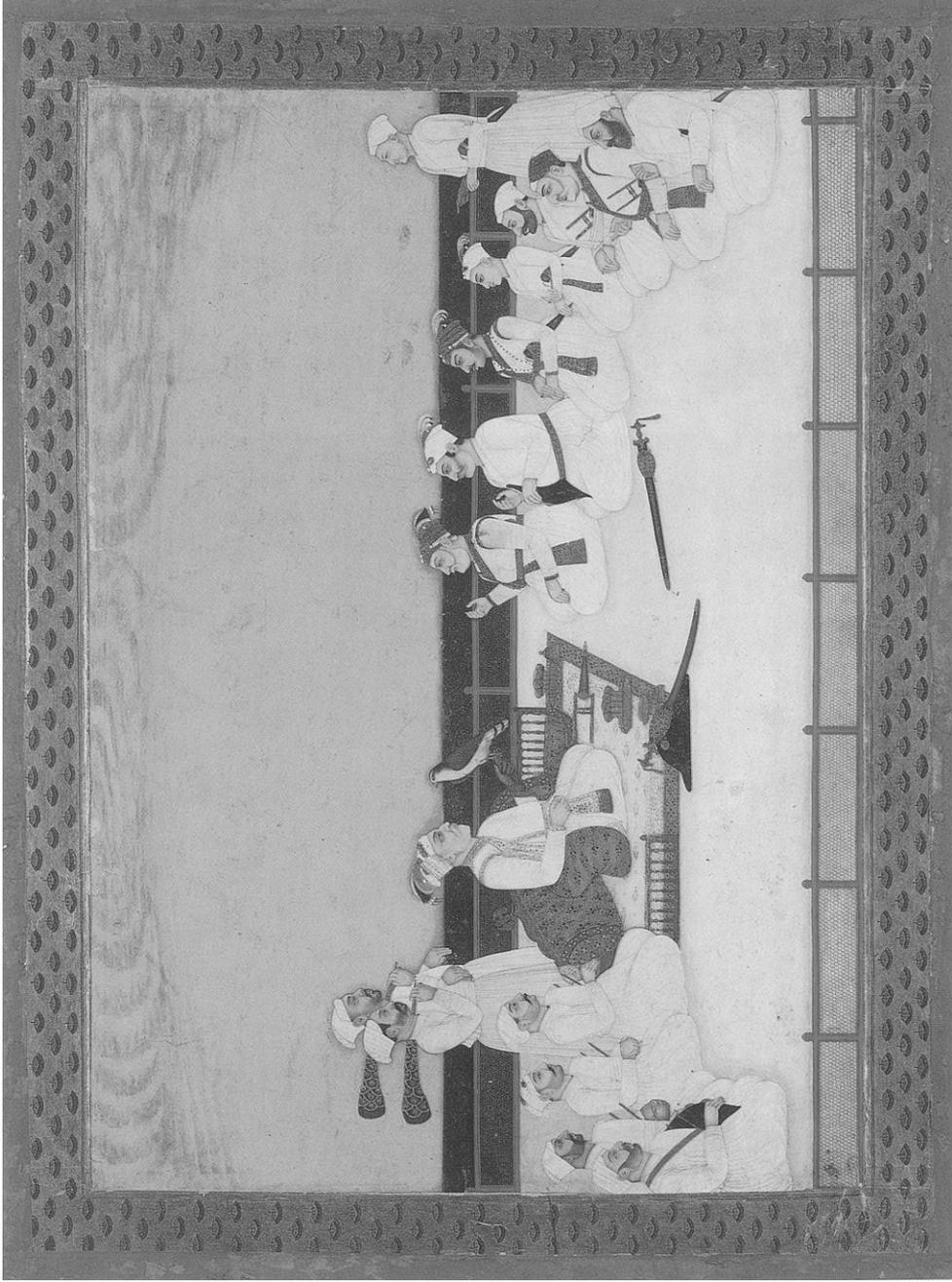


Fig. 56 Unknown artist, *A Nawab Holding Court, probably Alivardi Khan, c.1760*, opaque watercolour and gold, 16 × 22 in, Victoria and Albert Museum, London



Fig. 57 Michael Rysbrack, *Britannia Receiving the Riches of the East*, 1728, marble bas-relief overmantel, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Whitehall, London



Fig. 58 Anon., *Charity*, from the 1709 English edition of Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia: or, Moral Emblems* (Rome 1593), p. 12

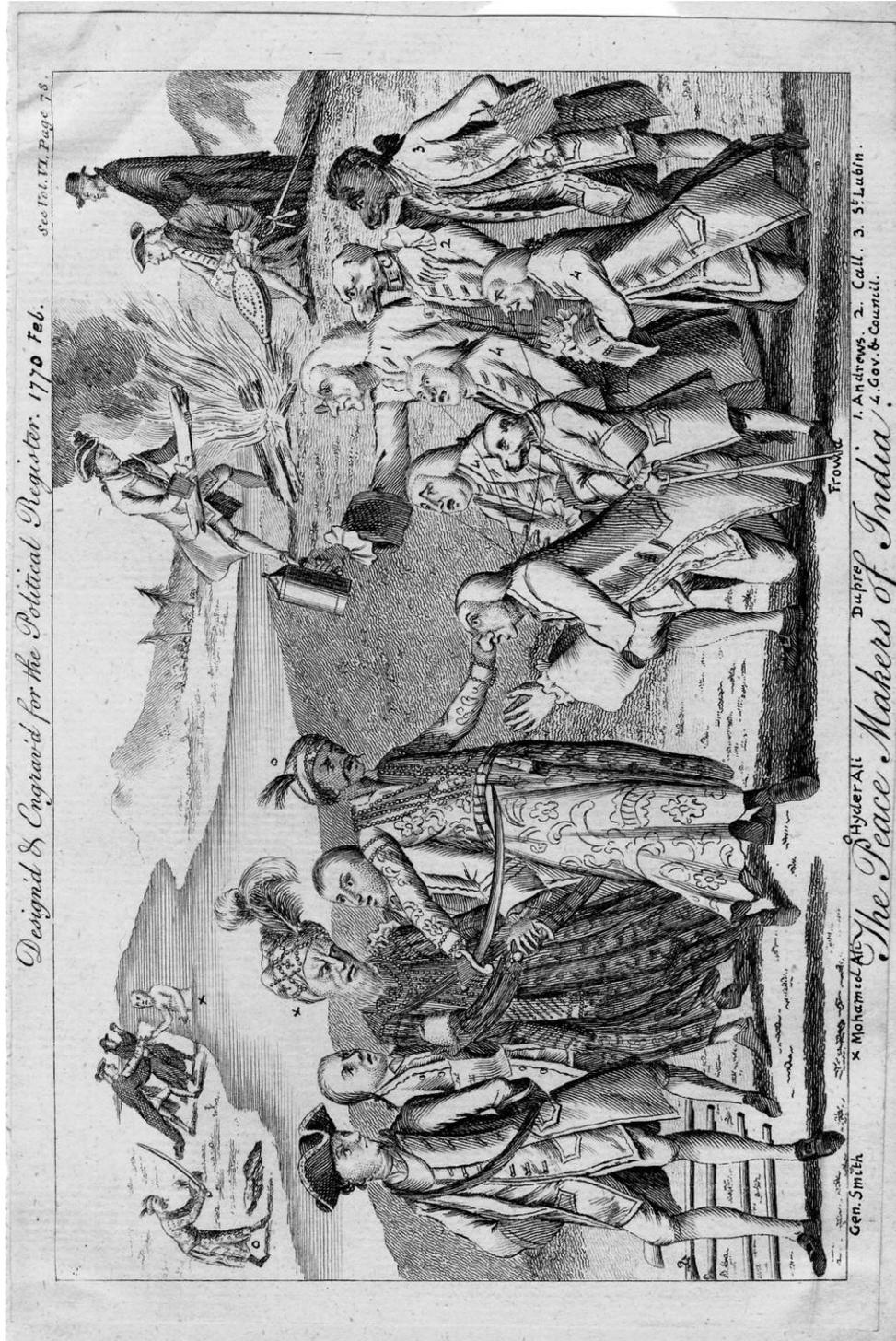


Fig. 59 Anon., *The Peace Makers of India*, from the *Political Register*, February 1770, vol. 6, British Museum, London



Fig. 60 Edward Penny, *The Profligate Punished by Neglect and Contempt*, 1774, oil on canvas, 48 ½ × 39 in, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection



Fig. 61 Edward Penny, *The Virtuous Comforted by Sympathy and Attention*, 1774, oil on canvas, 48 ½ × 39 in, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection

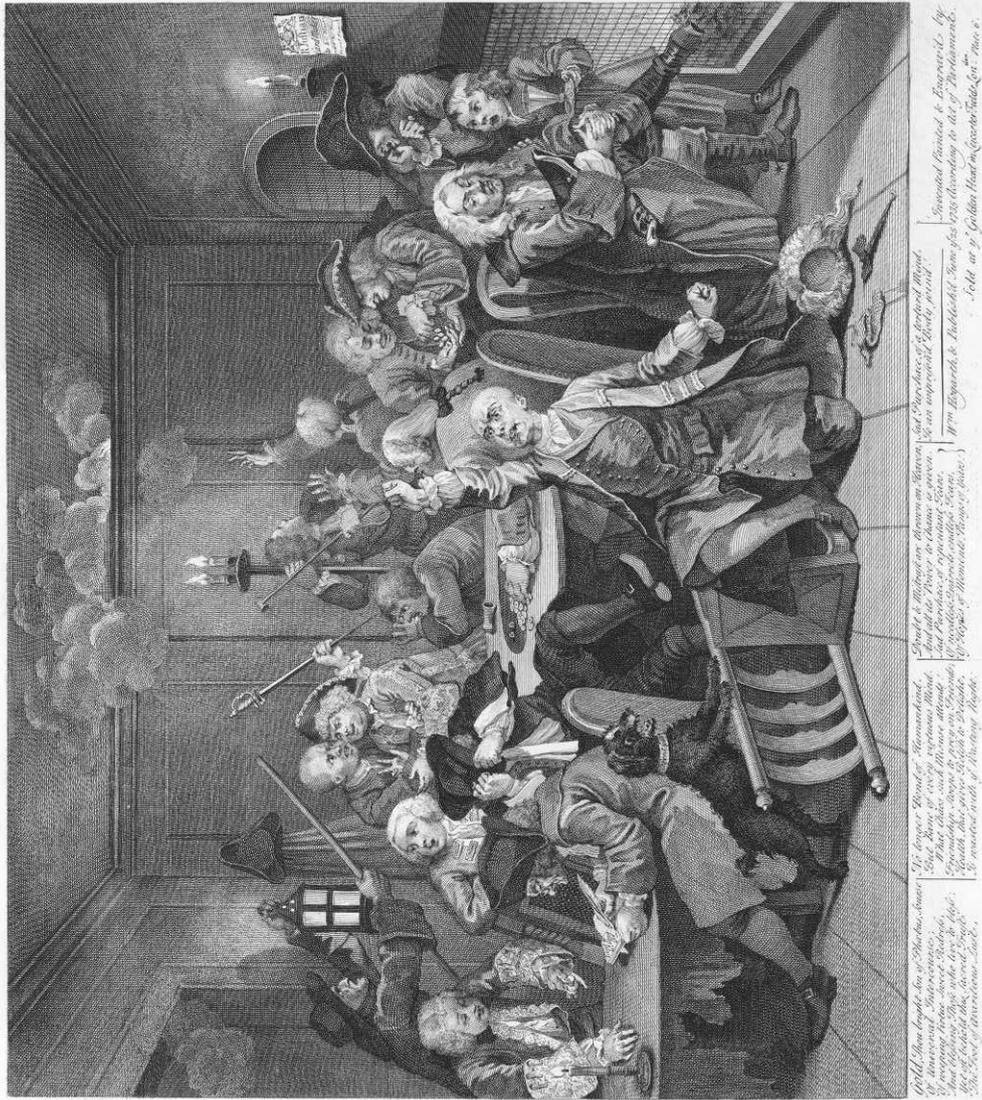


Fig. 62 William Hogarth assisted by Gérard Jean-Baptiste Scotin, *A Rake's Progress*,  
 Plate 6: *The Rake at the Gaming House*, published 25 June 1735, etching and  
 engraving, 14 × 15 7/8 in, British Museum, London



Fig. 63 William Hogarth, *The Strode Family*, c.1738,  
oil on canvas, 34 ¼ × 36 in, Tate Gallery, London

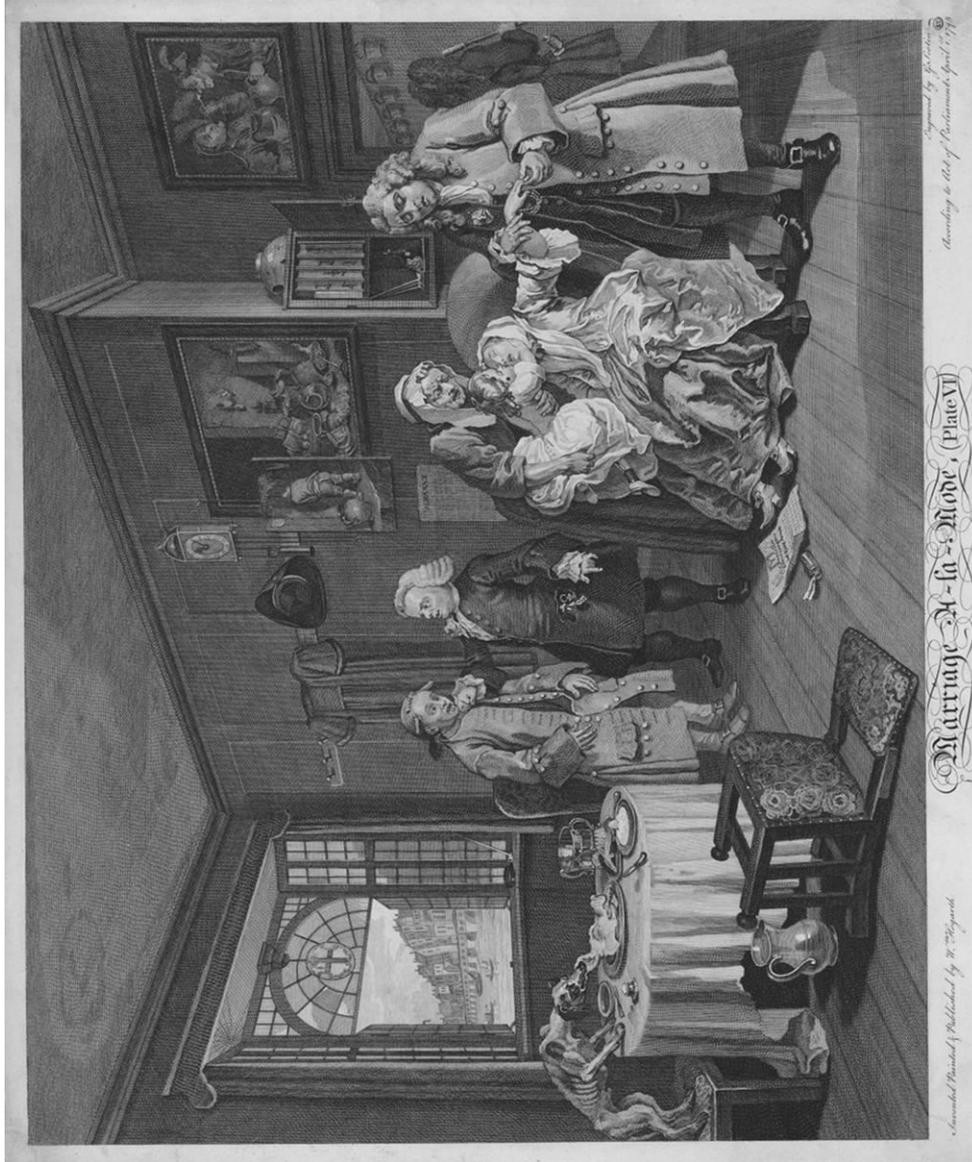


Fig. 64 Bernard Baron, Simon François Ravenet and Gérard Jean-Baptiste Scotin, with William Hogarth, *Marriage A-la-Mode, Plate 6: The Lady's Death*, published 1 April 1745, etching and engraving, 15  $\frac{3}{8}$  × 18  $\frac{1}{3}$  in, British Museum, London

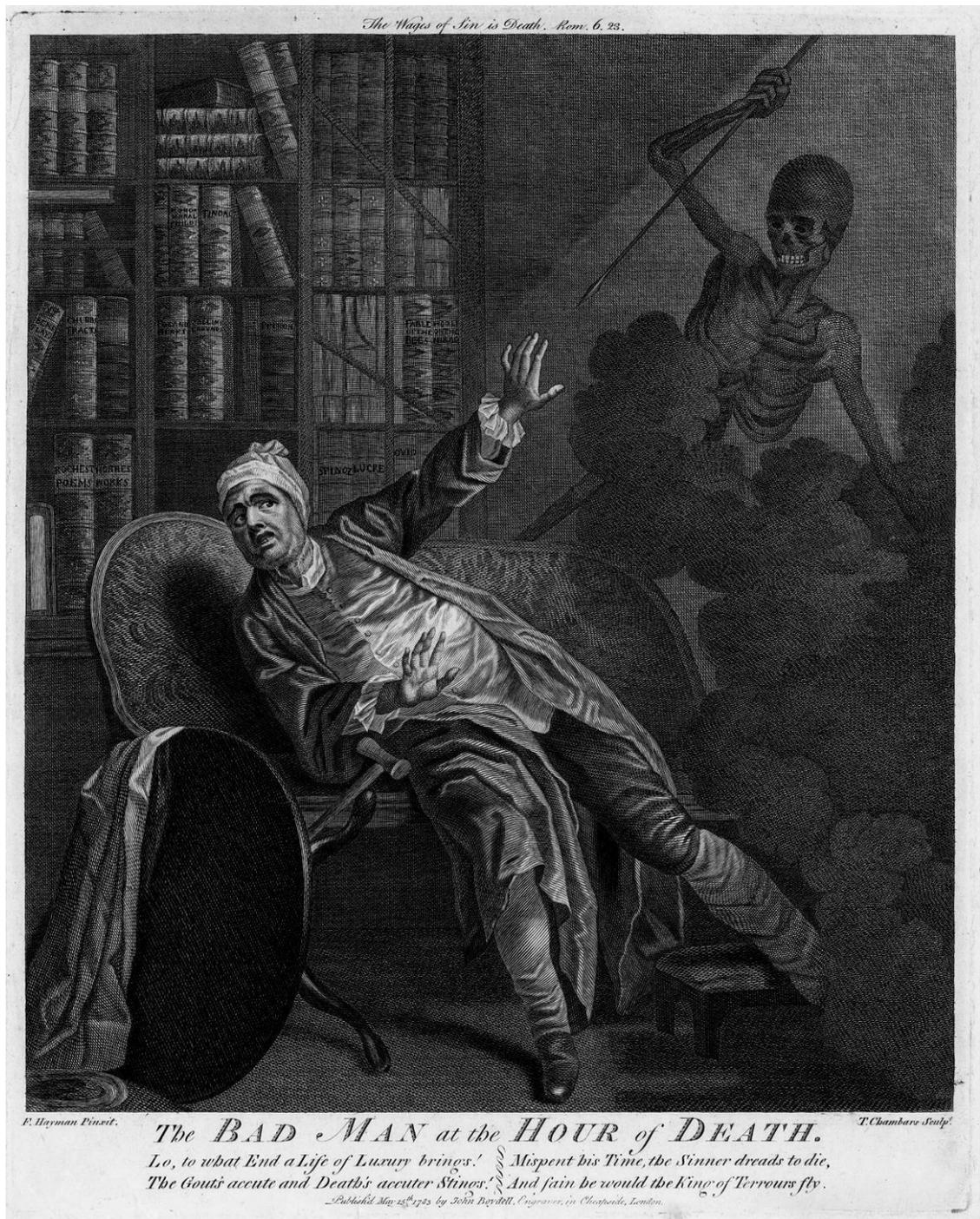


Fig. 65 Thomas A. E. Chambers after Francis Hayman, *The Bad Man at the Hour of Death*, published 15 May 1783, etching and engraving, 16 × 12 in, British Museum, London

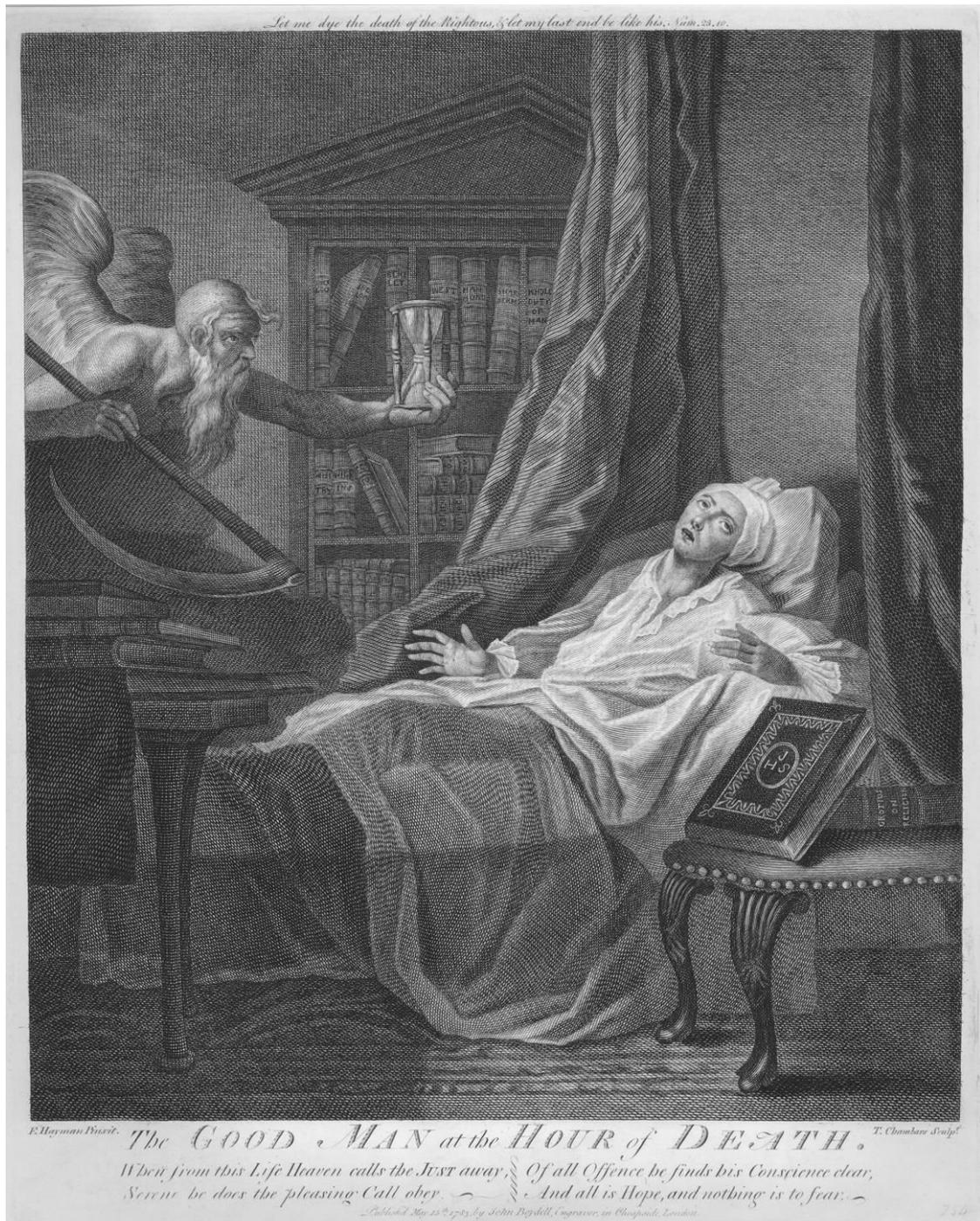


Fig. 66 Thomas A. E. Chambers after Francis Hayman, *The Good Man at the Hour of Death*, published 15 May 1783, etching and engraving, 15  $\frac{7}{8}$   $\times$  12  $\frac{1}{2}$  in, British Museum, London



Fig. 67 Anon., *The Batchelor's Curse*, published by Carrington Bowles, 1769, mezzotint, 13  $\frac{7}{8}$  × 9  $\frac{7}{8}$  in, British Museum, London



Fig. 68 Anon., *Conjugal Happiness*, published by Carrington Bowles, 1769, mezzotint, 13  $\frac{7}{8}$   $\times$  10 in, British Museum, London



Fig. 69 Bernard Baron, Simon François Ravenet and Gérard Jean-Baptiste Scotin, with William Hogarth, *Marriage A-la-Mode, Plate I: The Marriage Settlement*, published 1 April 1745, etching and engraving, 15 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 18 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>3</sub> in, British Museum, London

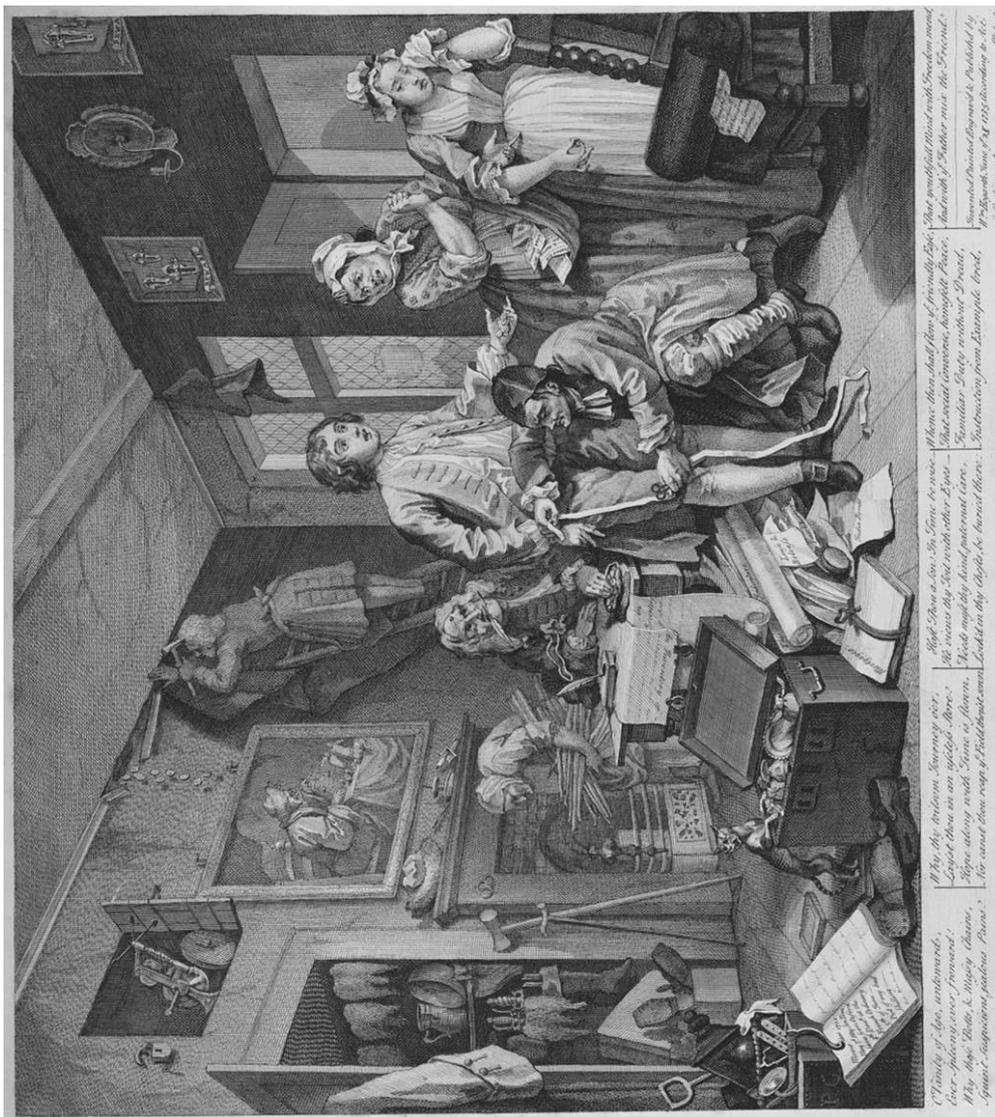


Fig. 70 William Hogarth assisted by Gérard Jean-Baptiste Scotin, *A Rake's Progress*, Plate 1: *The Rake Taking Possession of His Estate*, published 25 June 1735, etching and engraving, 14 × 15 7/8 in, British Museum, London

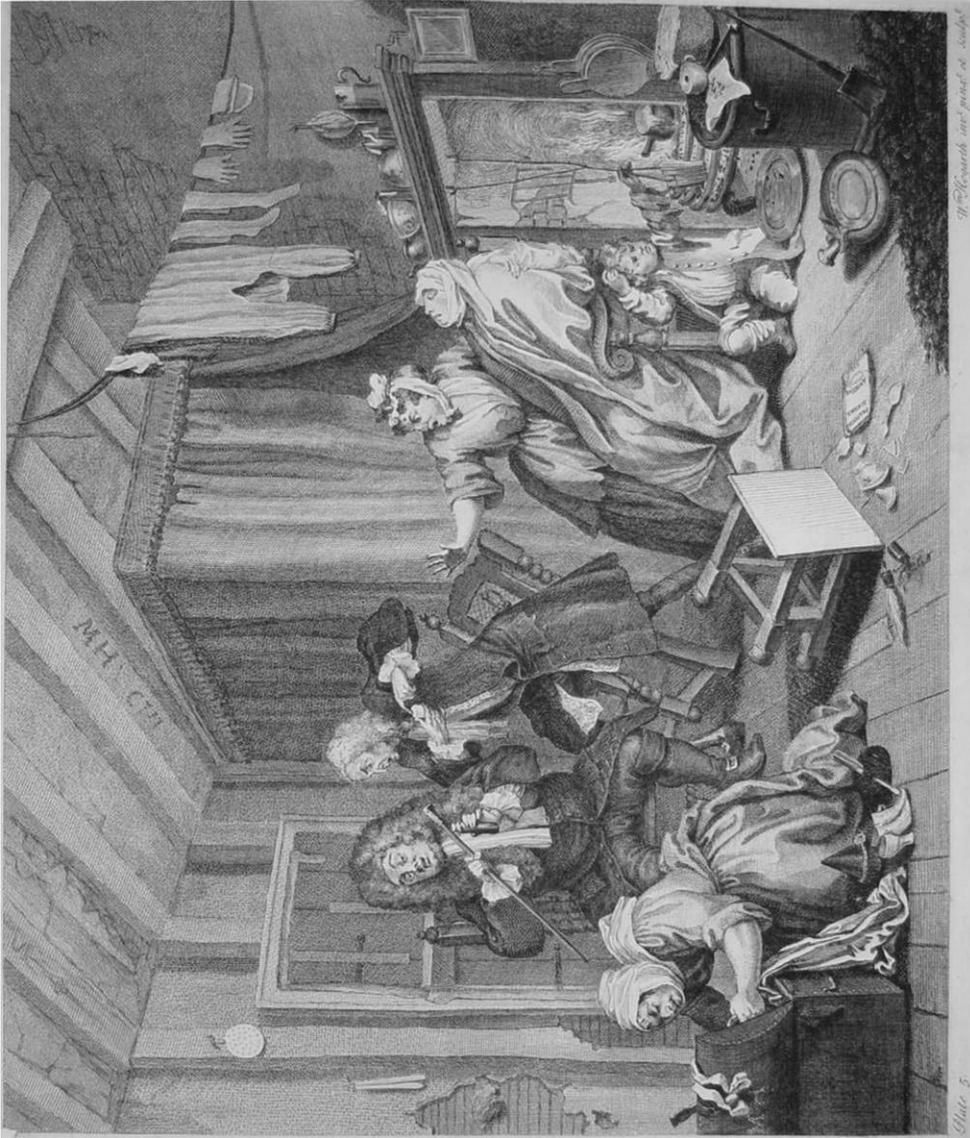


Fig. 71 William Hogarth, *A Harlot's Progress, Plate 5*, published April 1732, etching and engraving, 12  $\frac{5}{8}$   $\times$  15  $\frac{1}{3}$  in, British Museum, London



Fig. 72 Jan Steen, *The Dissolute Household or the Effects of Intemperance*, c.1660,  
oil on canvas, 33  $\frac{7}{8}$  × 41  $\frac{5}{8}$  in, location unknown



Fig. 73 Jacob Toorenvliet, *A Surgeon Binding up a Woman's Arm after Bloodletting*, 1666, oil on copper, 19  $\frac{7}{8}$   $\times$  15  $\frac{5}{8}$  in, Wellcome Library, London



Fig. 74 Edward Penny, *Jane Shore Led to Do Penance at St. Paul's. The Insolent in Office, and Pretenders to Purity, by Insulting the Wretched, Betray their Own Baseness*, 1775-76, oil on canvas, 64 × 48 in, Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, Birmingham



Fig. 75 Anon., frontispiece to the 1736 edition of Nicholas Rowe's *The Tragedy of Jane Shore* (reprint of frontispiece from 1714 edition)

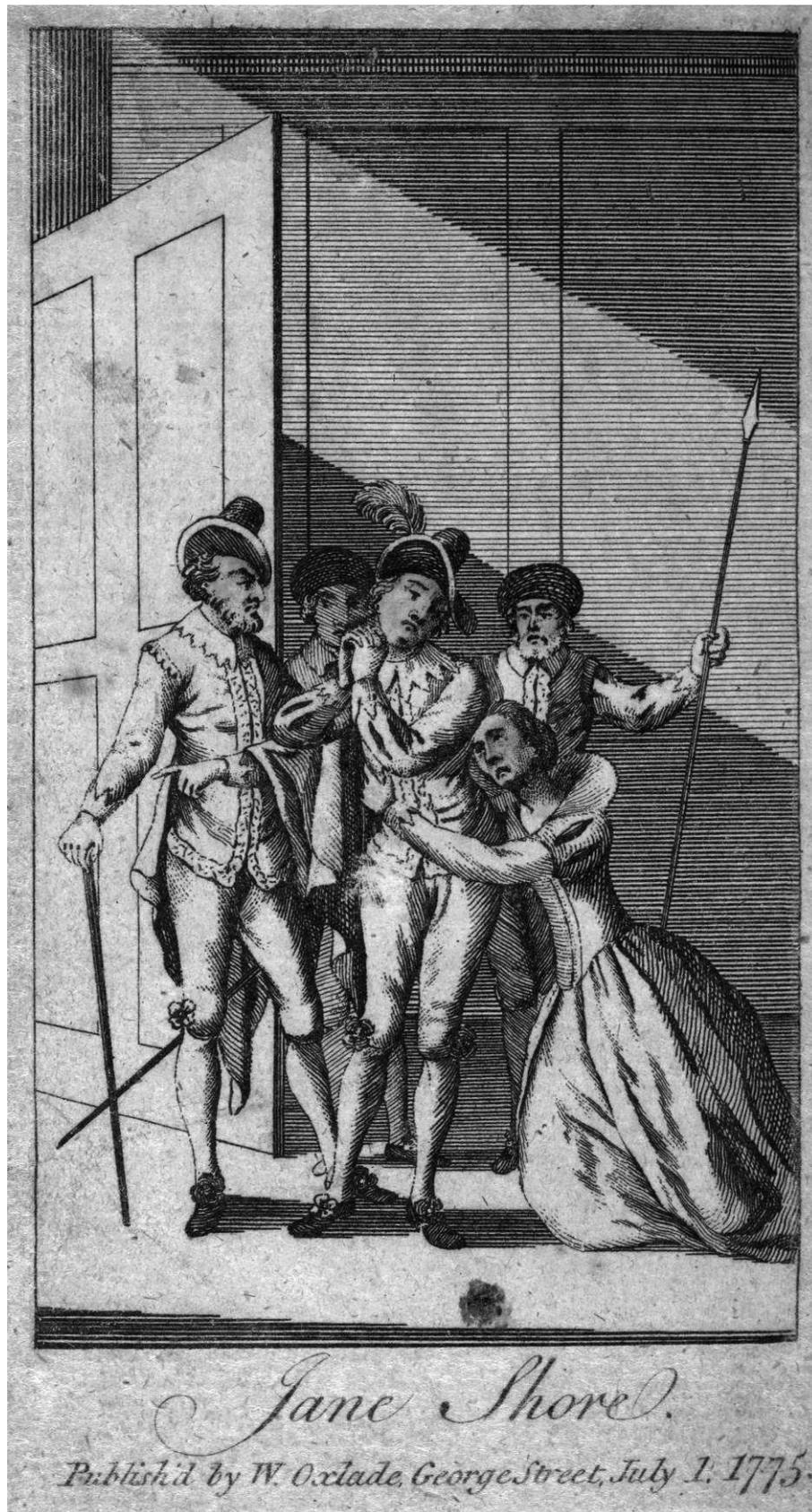


Fig. 76 Anon., frontispiece to the 1775 edition of Nicholas Rowe's *The Tragedy of Jane Shore*



Fig. 77 Joshua Reynolds, *Mrs Hartley as Jane Shore*, 1773,  
oil on canvas, 50 × 40 in, Private Collection

The History of

A very one that was his friend  
 His repent brought to shameful end  
 Then for my ride and woman life,  
 That made a trumpet of a wife  
 A penance did in Lombard-street  
 In shameful manner to a sheet.



where

Mistris Jane Shore.  
 Where many thousande did me bite,  
 Who late in Court my Credit knew,  
 Which made y<sup>e</sup> tears run down my face  
 To think upon my soule disgrace:  
 Not thus content they took from me  
 My Goods, my Livings, and my f<sup>r</sup>ie  
 And charg'd that none should me reliefe  
 For any succor to me give.  
 Then unto Straits Blague I went  
 To whom my Jewels I had sent,  
 In hope thereby to ease my want  
 When riches fail'd and love grew scant  
 What the devil'd to me the same,  
 When in my need for them I came;  
 To recompence my former love,  
 Out of her doys she did me shove:  
 So love did banish with my state,  
 Which now my soule repents too late;  
 Therefore example take by me,  
 For friendship paves in poverty,  
 But get one friend among the rest,  
 Whom I before had seen distress  
 And lab'd his life condemn'd to die,  
 Did give me sad to succour me,  
 For which by law it was decreed,  
 That he was hang'd for that deed:  
 His death did give me so much weep,  
 When he had died my self I weep:  
 There

Fig. 78 Anon., illustration (Jane Shore doing penance) from *The History of Mistris Jane Shore* (1660), p. 9

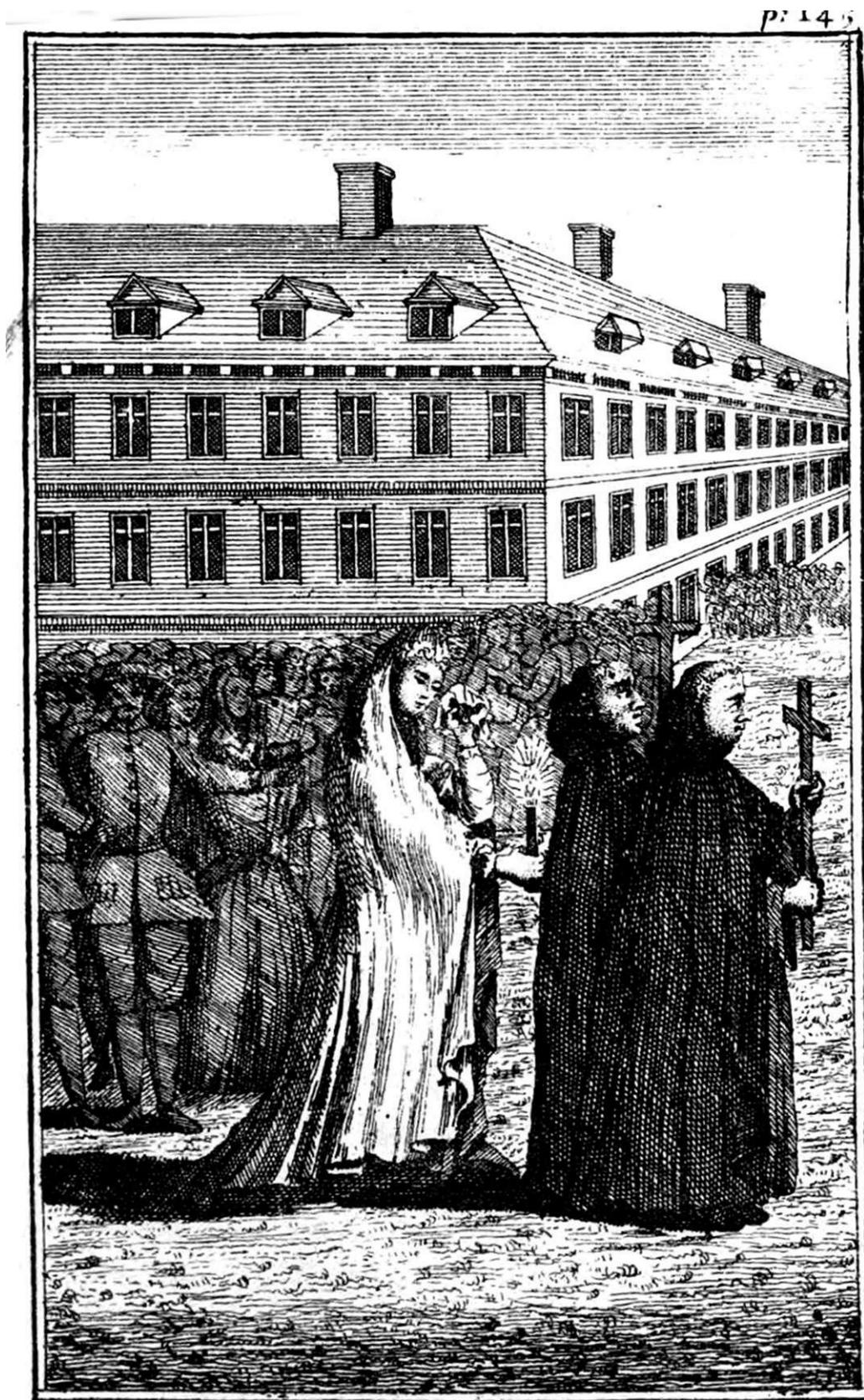


Fig. 79 Anon., illustration (Jane Shore doing penance) from Ambrose Philips's *A Collection of Old Ballads* (1723), p. 145



Fig. 80 Benjamin West, *Agrippina Landing at Brundisium with the Ashes of Germanicus*, 1768, oil on canvas, 64 ½ × 94 ½ in, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven

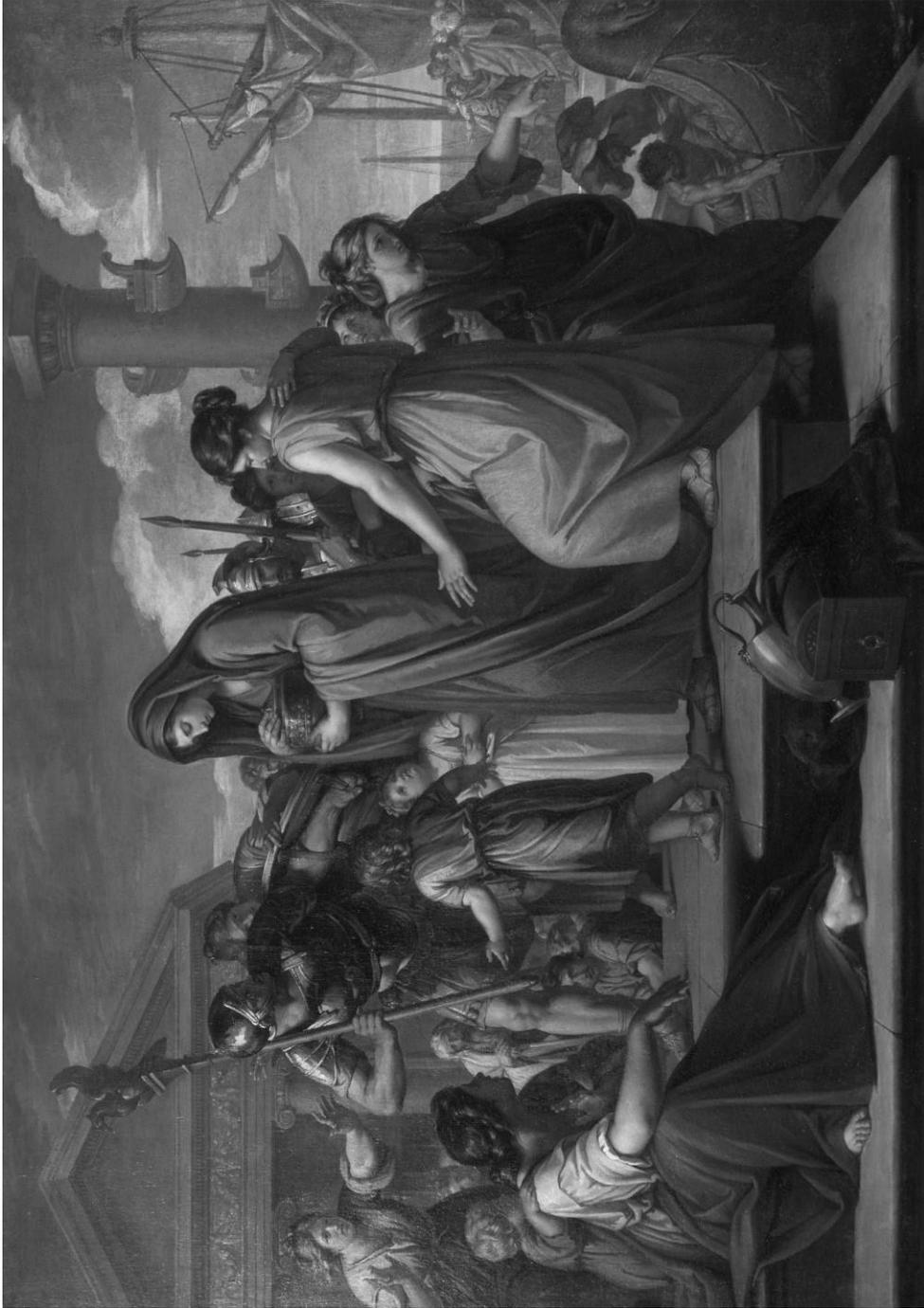


Fig. 81 Gavin Hamilton, *Agrippina Landing at Brindisium with the Ashes of Germanicus*, 1765-72, oil on canvas, 71  $\frac{7}{8}$   $\times$  100  $\frac{7}{8}$  in, Tate Gallery, London

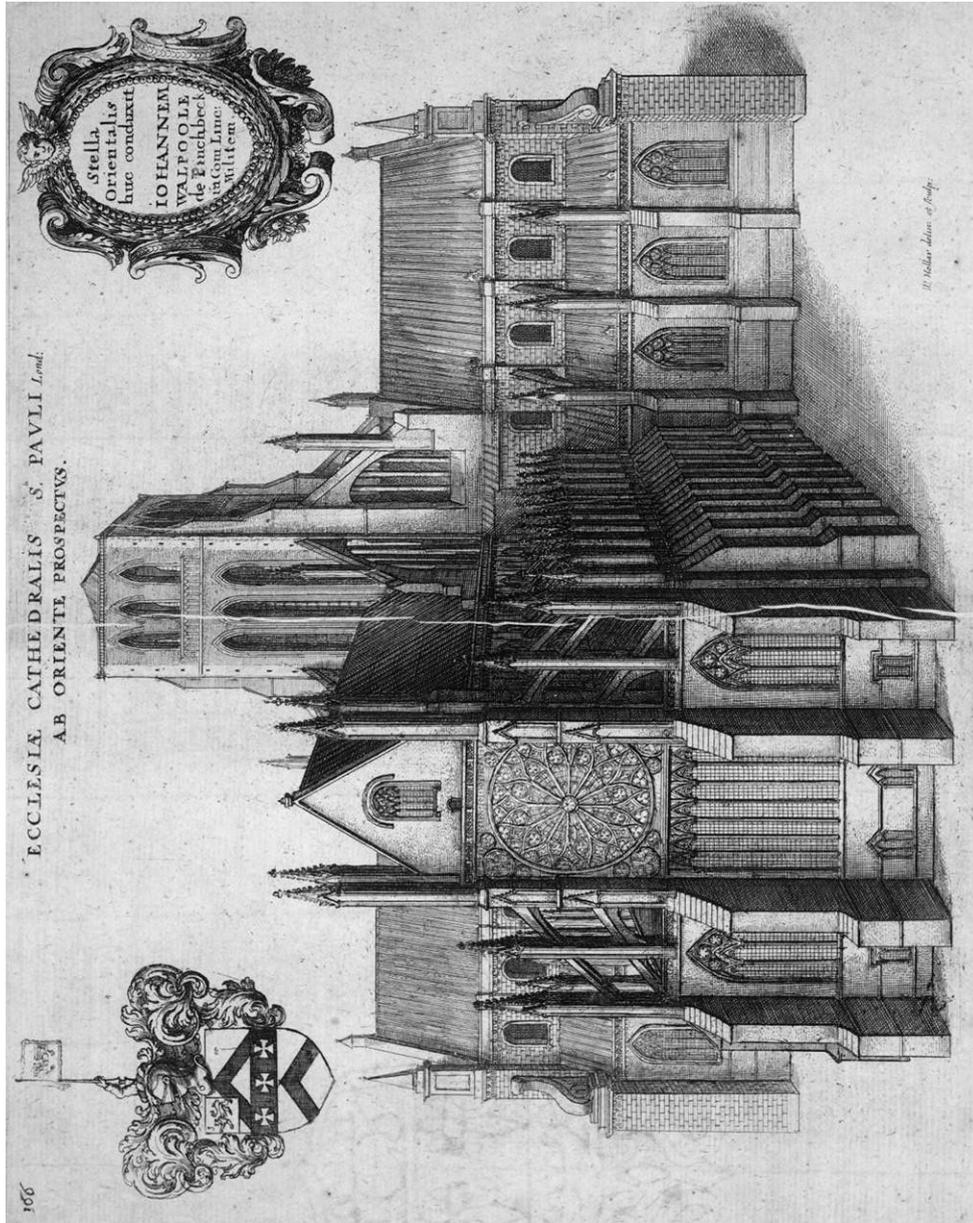


Fig. 82 Wenceslas Hollar, *East Front of 'Old' St. Paul's*, illustration from William Dugdale's *History of St. Paul's Cathedral in London* (1658), p. 166



Fig. 83 Matthew Darly after Paul Sandby, *The Well Fed English Constable*, published 1 October 1771, etching, 14 × 10 in, British Museum, London

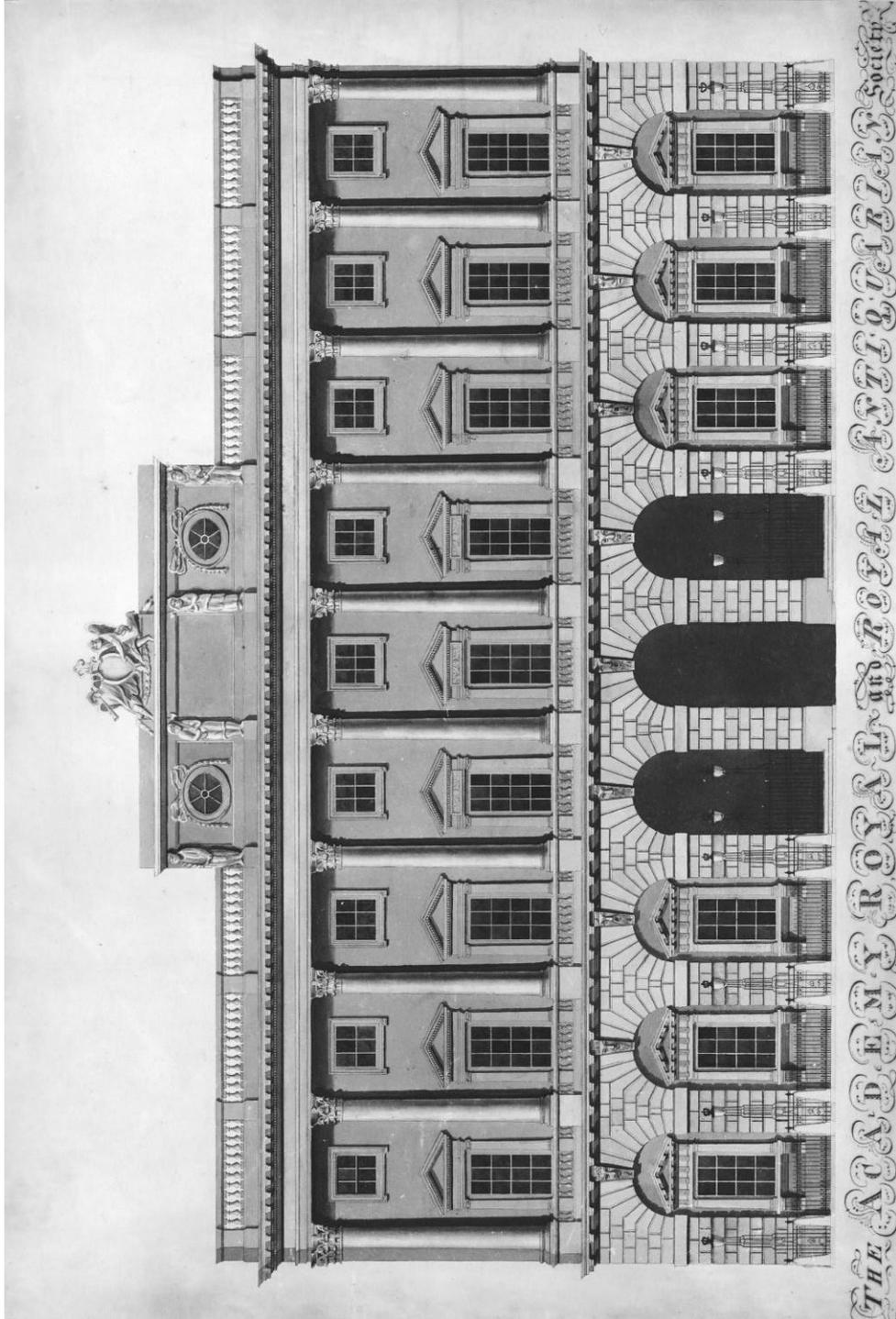


Fig. 84 Studio of William Chambers, *View of New Somerset House, Looking Towards the Strand*, c. 1786, pen and ink and wash,  $15\frac{1}{2} \times 22\frac{7}{8}$  in, British Museum, London

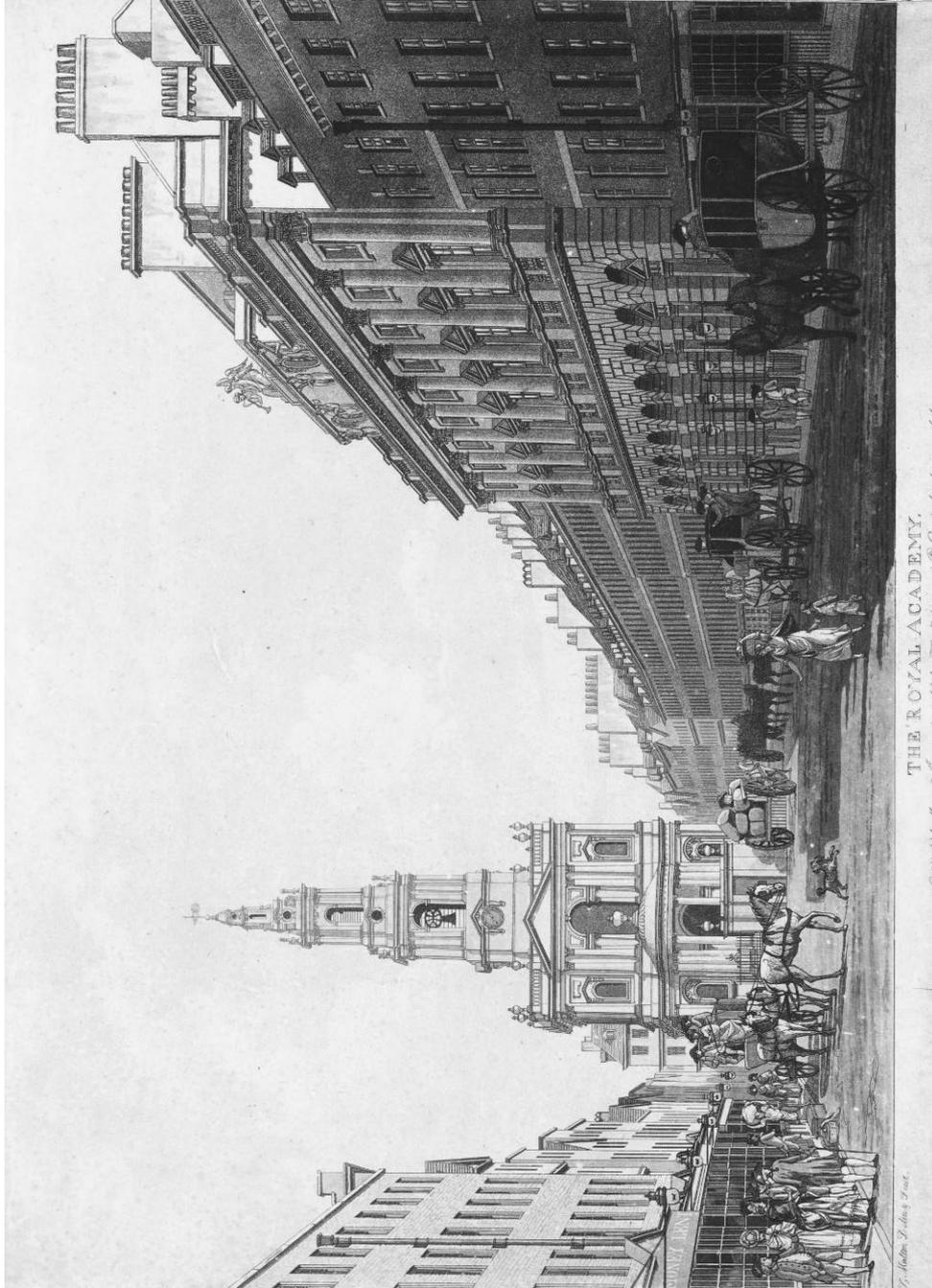


Fig. 85 Thomas Malton, *The Royal Academy*, published 21 May 1781, etching and aquatint, 13  $\frac{5}{8}$   $\times$  18  $\frac{7}{8}$  in, British Museum, London



Fig. 86 Pietro Antonio Martini after Johann Heinrich Ramberg, *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy*, published 1 July 1787, hand-coloured etching, 14  $\frac{7}{8}$  × 20  $\frac{7}{8}$  in, British Museum, London

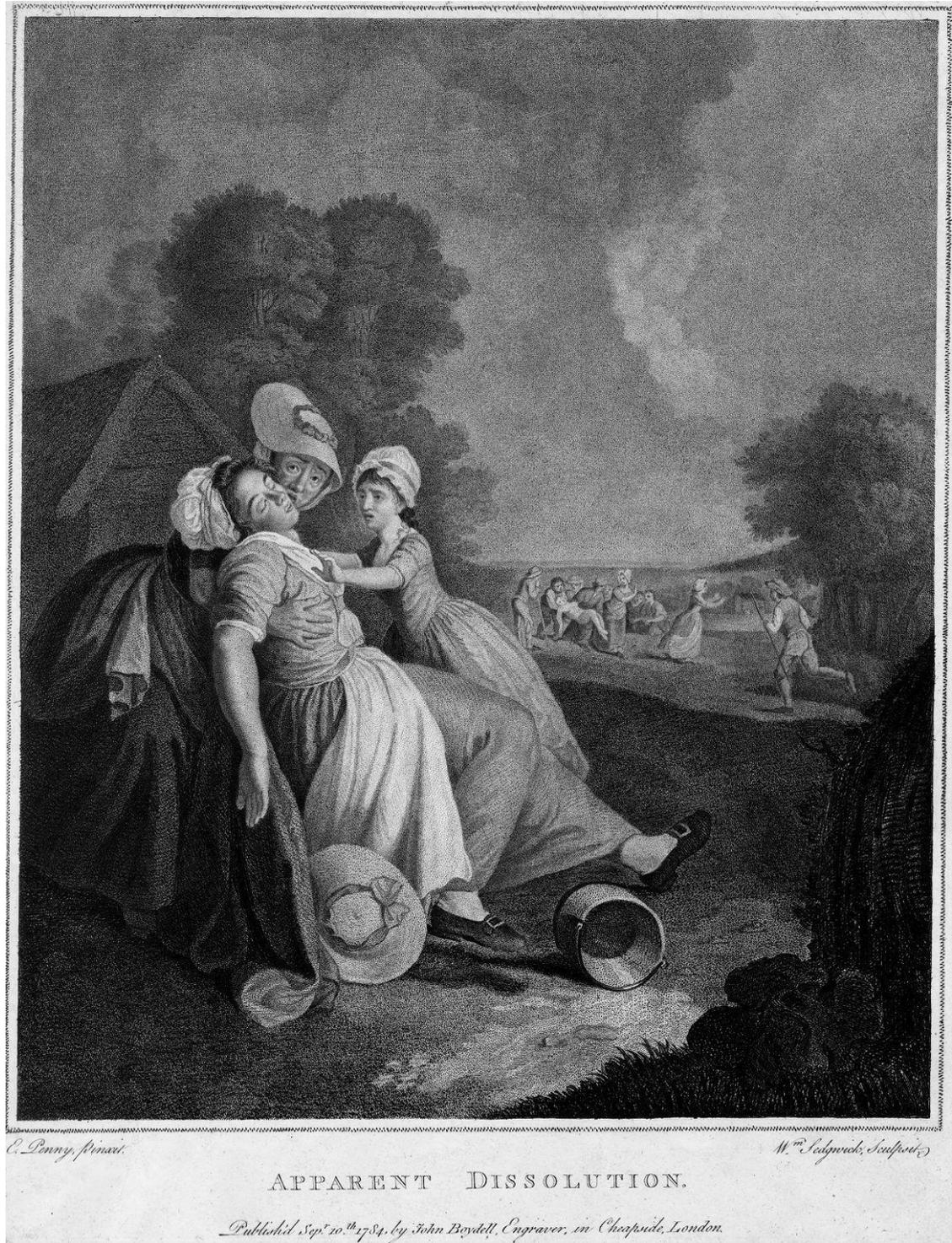


Fig. 87 William Sedgwick after Edward Penny, *Apparent Dissolution*, published 10 September 1784, stipple engraving, 13  $\frac{7}{8}$   $\times$  10  $\frac{7}{8}$  in, British Museum, London



Fig. 88 William Sedgwick after Edward Penny, *Returning Animation*, published 10 September 1784, stipple engraving, 13  $\frac{7}{8}$   $\times$  10  $\frac{7}{8}$  in, British Museum, London



Fig. 89 Edward Penny, *A Boy Taken Out of the Water Drowned*, 1780, oil on canvas, 50 × 40 ¼ in, location unknown

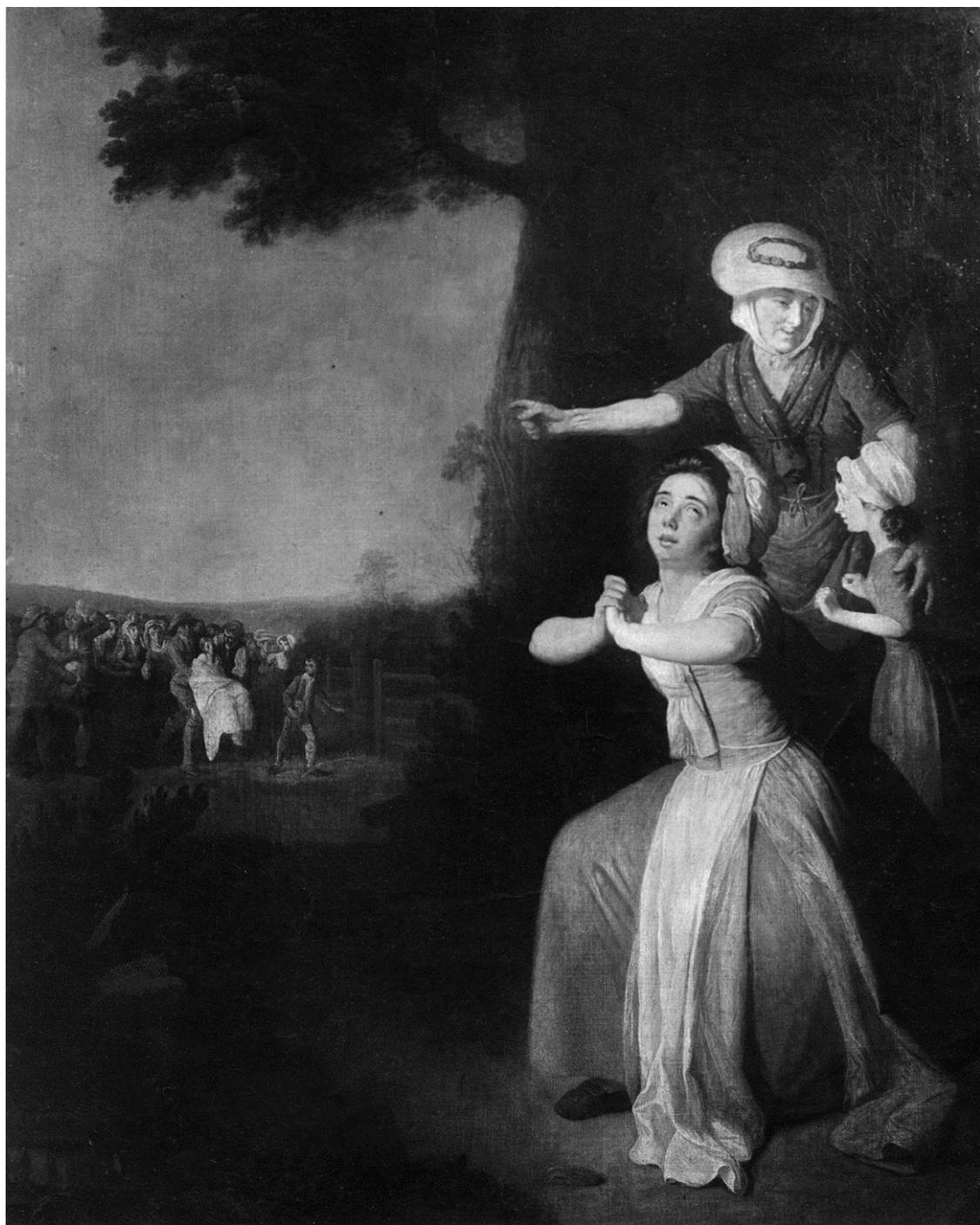


Fig. 90 Edward Penny, *The Boy by Proper Means Recovered*, 1780,  
oil on canvas, 50 ¼ × 40 in, location unknown



Fig. 91 Elias Martin, *These Hands Can Toil*, published 15 December 1778, stipple engraving, 8 ½ × 6 ½ in, British Museum, London

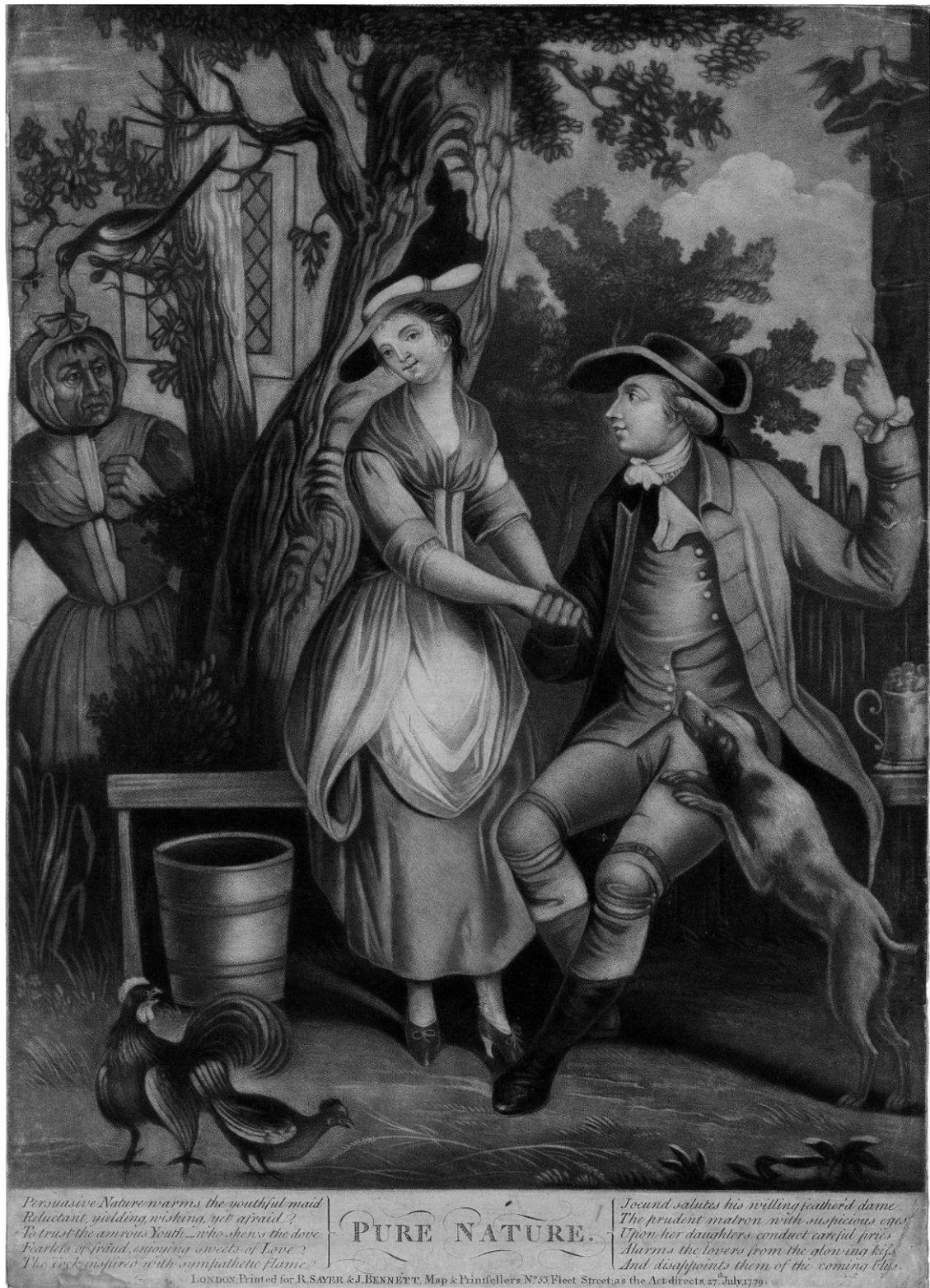


Fig. 92 Anon., *Pure Nature*, published 27 July 1779 by Robert Sayer and John Bennett, mezzotint, 14 1/8 × 10 in, British Museum, London



Fig. 93 Thomas Gainsborough, *Cottage Door with Children Playing*, 1777-78, oil on canvas, 48  $\frac{1}{4}$   $\times$  58  $\frac{3}{4}$  in, Cincinnati Art Museum, Gift in honour of Mr and Mrs Charles F. Williams by their children



Fig. 94 George Stubbs, *Labourers: Second Version*, 1779, oil on panel, 36 × 54 in., The National Trust, The Bearsted Collection, Upton House, Warwickshire

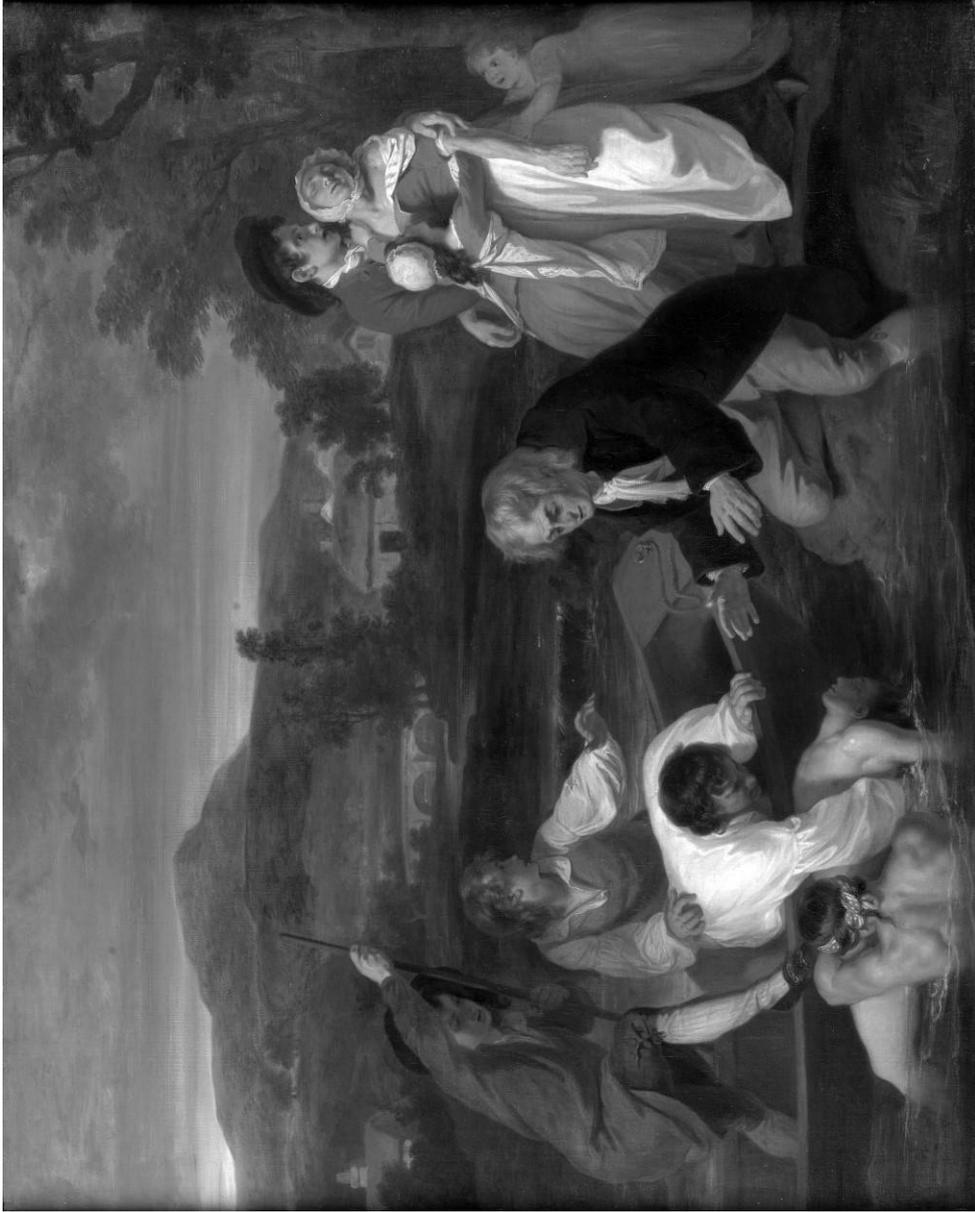


Fig. 95 Robert Smirke, *Young Man Lifted from the River, Apparently Drowned*, c.1787, oil on canvas, 40 ½ × 50 ¼ in, Government Art Collection, London



Fig. 96 Robert Smirke, *Recovery of a Young Man Believed Drowned after Resuscitation by Dr Hawes*, c.1787, oil on canvas, 40  $\frac{1}{4}$   $\times$  50 in, Government Art Collection, London



Fig. 97 Benjamin West, *Portrait of His Majesty, Two General Officers on Horseback and the Royal Navy in the Background*, 1779, oil on canvas, 100 ½ × 72 in, Royal Collection, London



Fig. 98 Benjamin West, *Portrait of Her Majesty, the Royal Family in the Background*, 1779, oil on canvas, 101 × 71 ½ in, Royal Collection, London

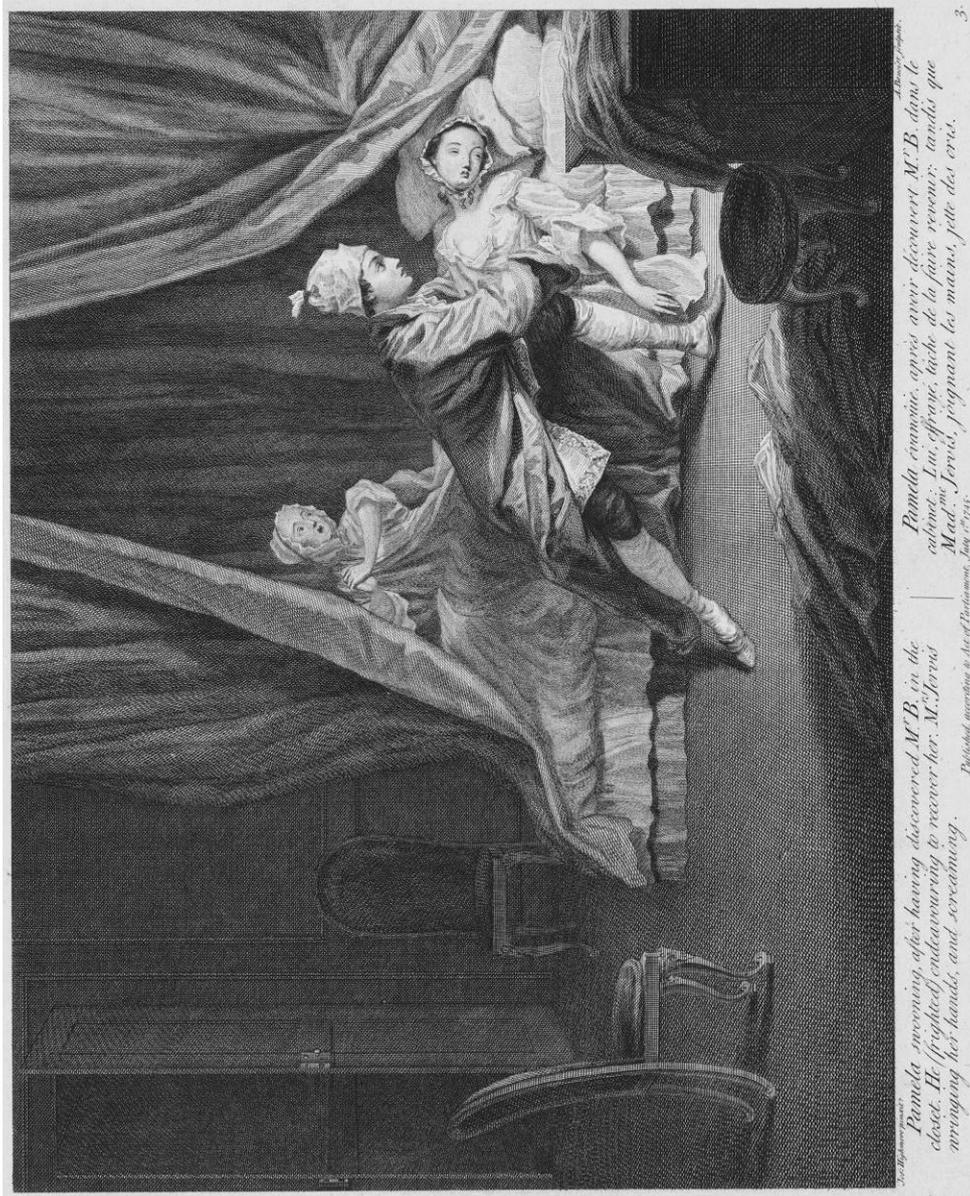


Fig. 99 Antoine Benoit after Joseph Highmore, *Pamela Swooning, After Having Discovered Mr B in the Closet*, Published 1 July 1745, etching and engraving, 11.8 × 14.8 in, British Museum, London



Fig. 100 Raphael, *The Entombment (Deposition)*, 1507, oil on panel, 70 ½ × 68 ½ in, Galleria Borghese, Rome



Fig. 101 Guercino, *Santa Margherita da Cortona*, 1648, oil on canvas, 100 × 66  $\frac{7}{8}$  in, Pinacoteca Vaticana, Vatican City



Fig. 102 Pieter Aertsen, *A Meat Stall with the Holy Family Giving Alms*, 1551, oil on panel, 45 ½ × 66 ½ in, North Carolina Museum of Art, purchased with funds from Wendell and Linda Murphy and various donors, by exchange



Fig. 103 Diego Velázquez, *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary*, 1618, oil on canvas,  
23  $\frac{5}{8}$   $\times$  40  $\frac{5}{8}$  in, National Gallery, London



Fig. 104 Edward Penny, *Lavinia, Daughter of the Once Rich Acasto, Discovered Gleaning. Vide Thomson's Seasons, 1781*, oil on canvas, 49  $\frac{3}{4}$   $\times$  39  $\frac{1}{2}$  in, location unknown



Fig. 105 William Woollett after Richard Wilson, *Celadon and Amelia*, published 10 June 1766, etching and engraving, 17  $\frac{5}{8}$  × 21  $\frac{5}{8}$  in, British Museum, London



Fig. 106 Nicolas Tardier after William Kent, *Autumn*, frontispiece to Book III of *The Seasons* (London: printed for John Millan and Andrew Millar, 1730)



Fig. 107 Edward Malpas after George Wright, *Autumn*, frontispiece to Book III of *The Seasons* (London: printed for J. French, 1777)

## PALEMON &amp; LAVINIA.



Hamilton. Delin.

Caldwall. Sculp.

*Then throw that shameful pittance from thy hand,  
 But ill applied to such a rugged task;  
 The Fields, the Master, all, my Fair, are thine.*

*London 1<sup>st</sup> April 1778, Publish'd as the Act directs by J. Murray N<sup>o</sup> 32 Fleetstreet.*

Fig. 108 James Caldwell after William Hamilton, *Palemon and Lavinia*, illustration from *The Seasons* (London: printed for John Murray, 1778)



Fig. 109 John Raphael Smith after William Lawranson, *Palemon and Lavinia*, published 10 November 1780, mezzotint, 19  $\frac{7}{8}$   $\times$  14 in, Davison Art Center, Wesleyan University, Friends of the Davison Art Center funds, 1992



Fig. 110 Nathaniel Dance-Holland, *Thomas 'Sense' Browne*, 1775, oil on canvas, 91 × 55 in, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection

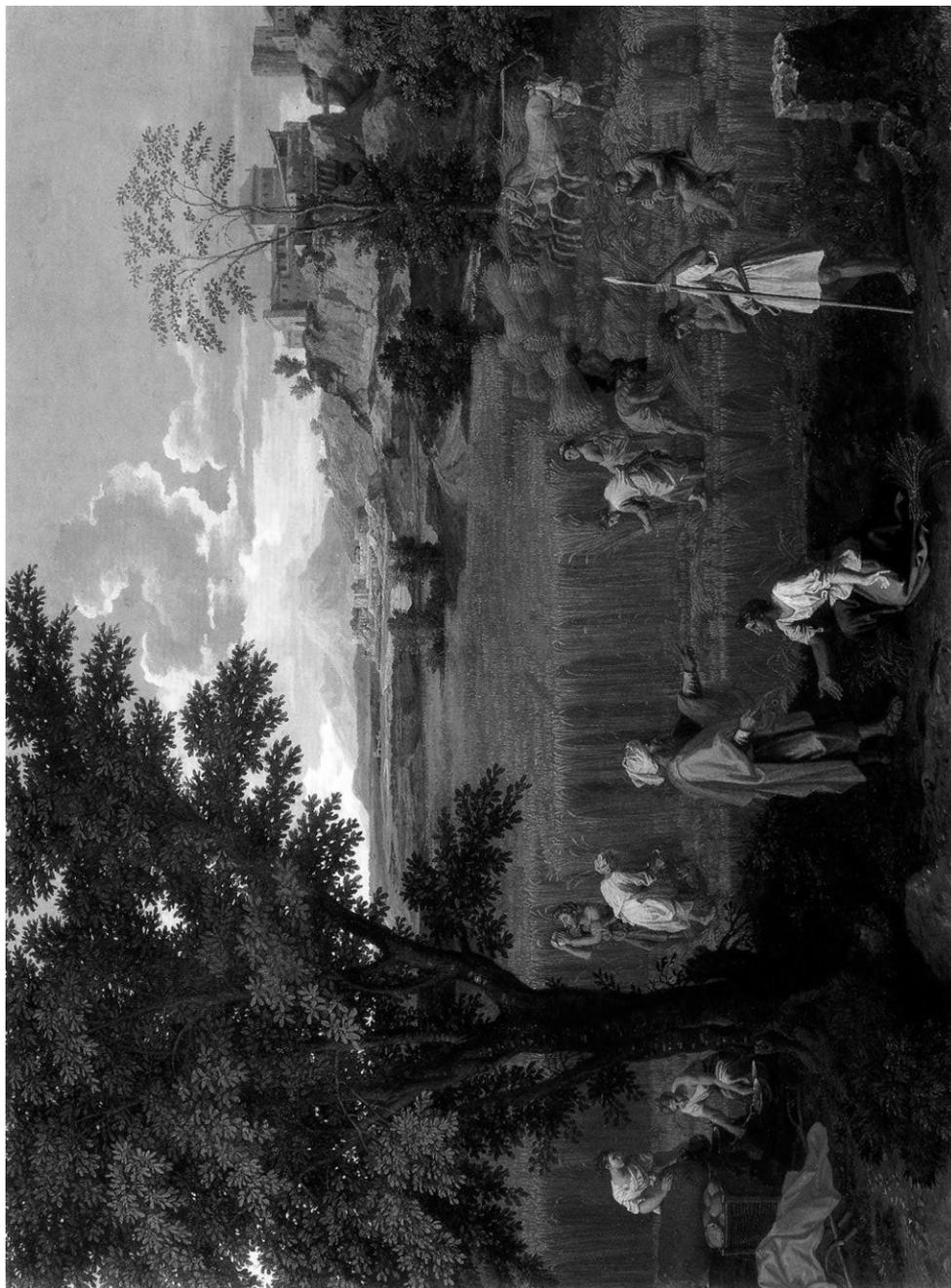


Fig. 111 Nicolas Poussin, *Summer, with Ruth Gleaning in Boaz's Fields*, from *The Four Seasons*, 1660-64, oil on canvas, 46 ½ × 63 in, Musée du Louvre, Département des Peintures, Paris

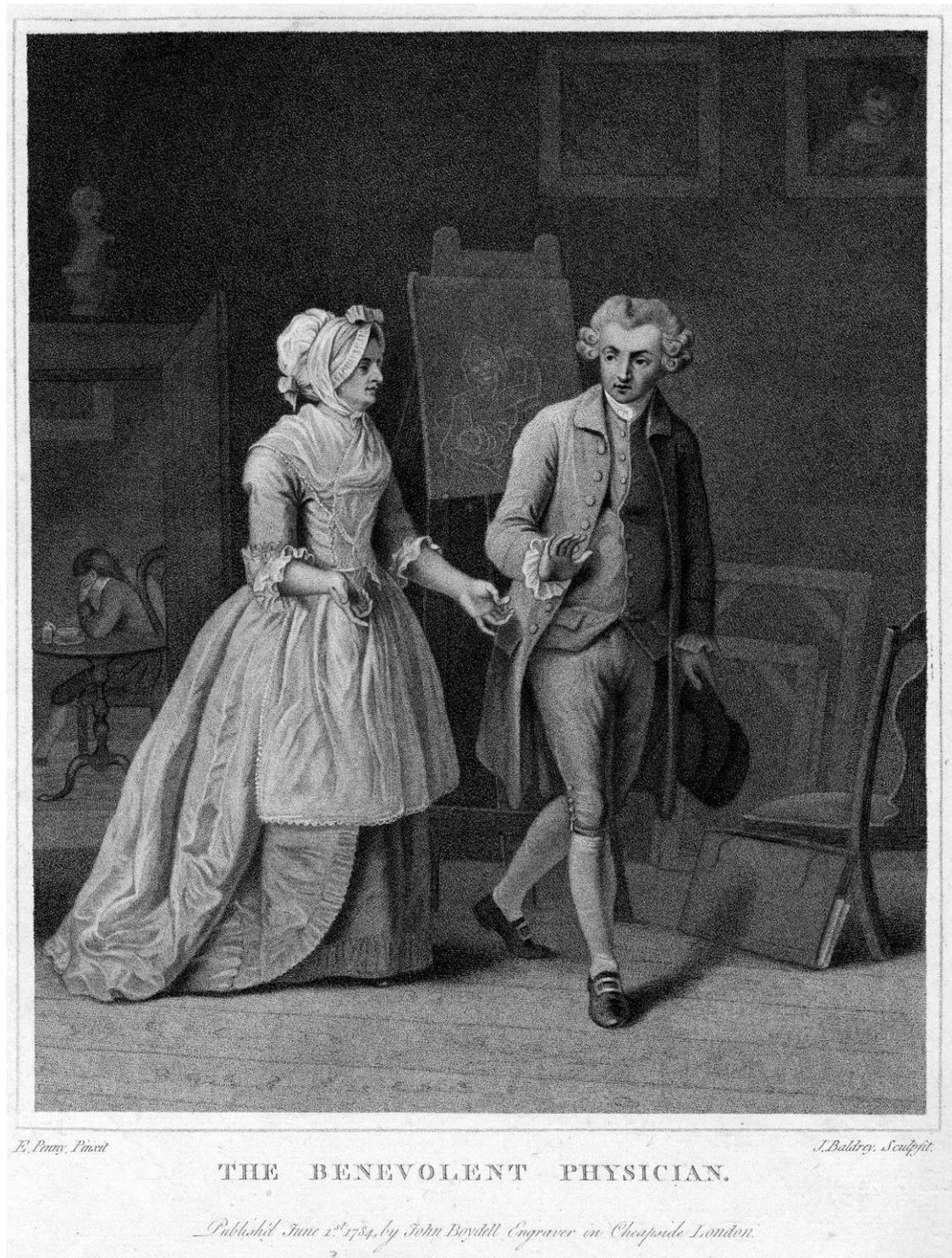


Fig. 112 Joshua Kirby Baldrey after Edward Penny, *The Benevolent Physician*, published 1 June 1784, stipple engraving 14 × 10 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in, British Museum, London



Fig. 113 Joshua Kirby Baldrey after Edward Penny, *The Rapacious Quack*, c. 1783-84, stipple engraving 12  $\frac{1}{3}$   $\times$  9  $\frac{5}{8}$  in, British Museum, London



Fig. 114 Edward Penny, *Widow Costard's Cow and Goods Distained for Taxes, are Redeemed by the Generosity of Johnny Pearmain*, 1782, oil on canvas, 36 × 31 in, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection

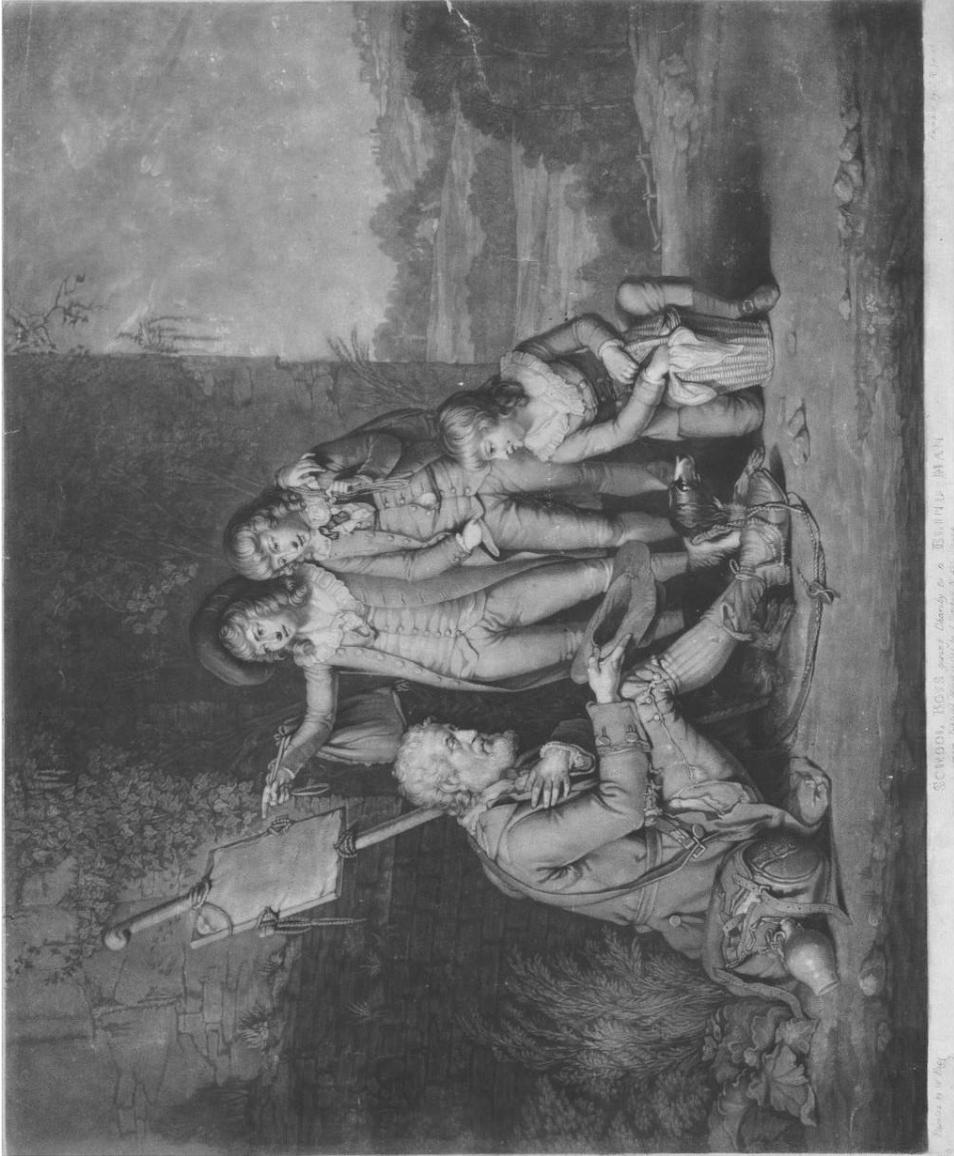


Fig. 115 John Raphael Smith after William Redmore Bigg, *School Boys Giving Charity to a Blind Man*, published 12 March 1784, mezzotint, 18 × 21 7/8 in, British Museum, London

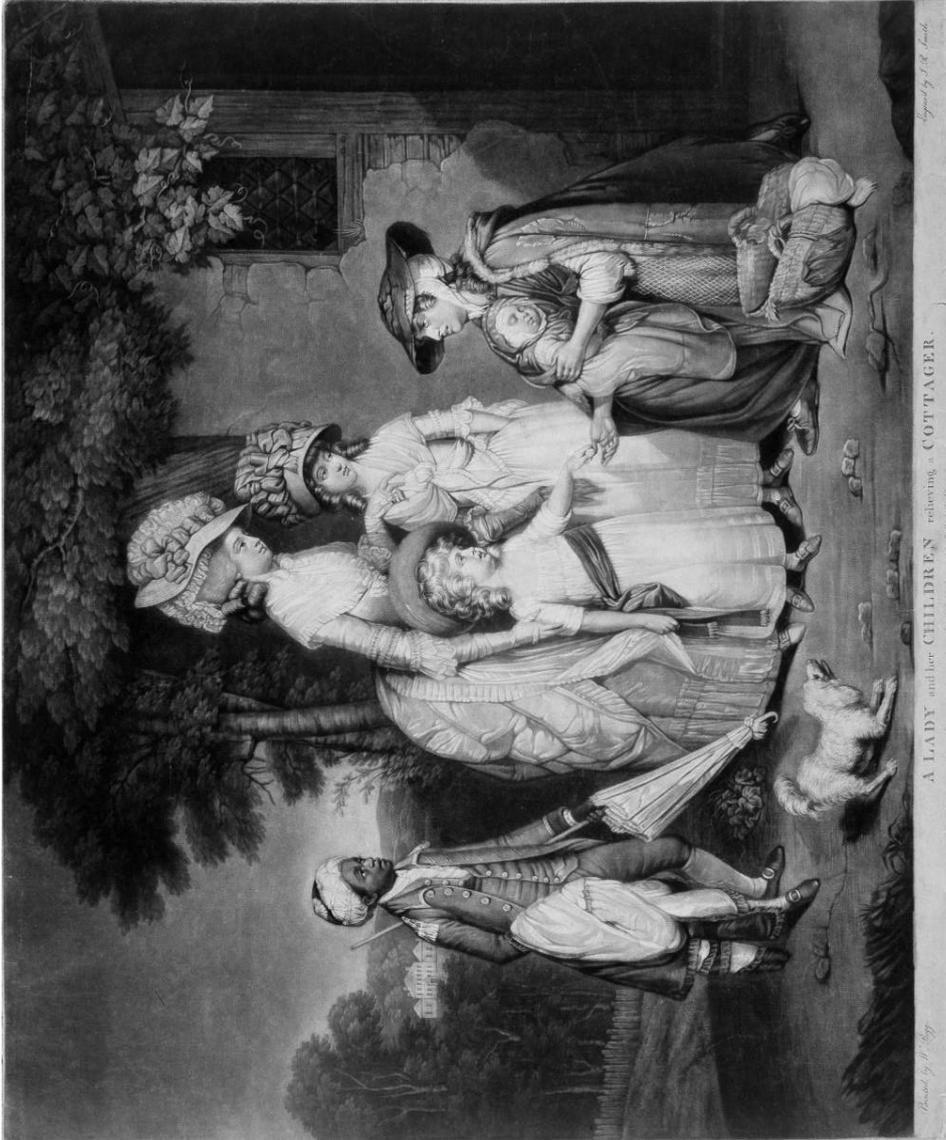


Fig. 116 John Raphael Smith after William Redmore Bigg, *A Lady and her Children Relieving a Cottager*, published 1 March 1784, mezzotint, 17  $\frac{3}{4}$  × 22 in, British Museum, London



Fig. 117 Henry Hudson after George Morland, *The Comforts of Industry*, published 20 January 1790, mezzotint, 13 1/3 × 14 7/8 in, British Museum, London



Fig. 118 Henry Hudson after George Morland, *The Miseries of Idleness*, published 20 January 1790, mezzotint, 13  $\frac{1}{3}$  × 14  $\frac{7}{8}$  in, British Museum, London



Painted by F. Wheatley

Engraved by W. Nutter

Printed by B. & J. Jeffries, Ludgate-Hill

### THE BENEVOLENT COTTAGER

*Pity the sorrows of a poor old man,  
Whose trembling limbs have torn him to your door;  
Whose days are dwindled to the shortest span,  
Oh! give relief and Heaven will bless your store.*

### LA PAYSANNE BIENFAISANTE

*These little'd doaths my poverty lay back,  
These heavy looks proclaim my lengthen'd years,  
And many a furrow in my grief-worn cheek,  
Has been the channel to a flood of tears.*

London: Published 21 March 1788 by Ball & Jeffries, Ludgate-Hill

Fig. 119 William Nutter after Francis Wheatley, *The Benevolent Cottager*, published 21 March 1788, stipple engraving, 20 ½ × 14 ½ in, British Museum, London



Fig. 120 David Wilkie, *Village Politicians*, 1806, oil on canvas, 22 ½ × 29 ½ in,  
The Right Hon. The Earl of Mansfield and Mansfield