

Abigail Winograd

Proposal

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Who Understood *The Golden Pippin Boys on the Branches of State*?

In her introduction to *The Age of Caricature: Satirical Prints in the Reign of George III*, Diana Donald expresses a commonly held opinion of the print production of this period.

Whether in the patten of peepshow operators and traveling peddlars[sic], or in animated political debates in coffee houses, taverns and barbers' shops, or in the more sophisticated savouring of Gillray's witticisms in aristocratic circles, the caricature prints once formed a living part of everyday experience in Georgian Britain.¹

The majority of art historical scholarship on Late Georgian prints departs from this same assumption. Donald's statement appears to be based upon the belief that the ability to view and comprehend satirical print culture transcended boundaries of class, gender, and location. While it is apparent that the print culture of Late Georgian Britain was expanding and reaching a broader audience it cannot be inferred from the available scholarly material that the print culture of the period was accessible to a majority of Britons.

Any claim of democratic influence must be based upon proof of equality of access and understanding which simply did not exist in late eighteenth century Britain. *The Golden Pippin Boys on the Branches of State* was one of the satirical documents produced during this period. The print has visual and textual components which are inextricably linked in that the inability to read the accompanying text makes the visual representation opaque. It is unlikely that more than two percent of British society could read and thereby grasp the content of this and other satirical prints. In order to support this assertion the analysis included in this work begins with an iconographic assessment of *The Golden Pippin Boys* followed by a socio-historical evaluation of British culture.

¹ Diana Donald. *The Age of Caricature: Satirical Prints in the Reign of George III* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 7.