



# James Northcote, History Painting, and the Fables (Yale Center for British Art)

*Mark Ledbury*

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The artistic accomplishments of James Northcote (1746–1831) have tended to be overshadowed by his role as a biographer of Joshua Reynolds, first president of the Royal Academy of Arts, with whom Northcote apprenticed for five years. Here, Mark Ledbury constructs a very different image of Northcote: that of a prolific member of the Royal Academy and an active participant in the cultural and political circles of the Romantic era, as well as a portrait and history painter in his own right. This book pays particular attention to Northcote's *One Hundred Fables* (1828), a masterpiece of wood engraving, and the unconventional, collaged manuscripts for the volume, now at the Yale Center for British Art. Along with another series of collages now at The Morgan Library & Museum and a second volume of fables published posthumously in 1833, these collages and printed works constitute the most ambitious project of the artist's later years. An underappreciated and courageously eccentric masterpiece, the Fables were an early experiment in what is now a familiar multimedia practice and are extensively published here for the first time. Idiosyncratic, personal, and visionary, the Fables serve as a lens through which to examine Northcote's long, complex, and fruitful artistic career.



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