2001

Hogarth and the aesthetics of nationalism

Timothy Erwin
University of Nevada, Las Vegas, timothy.erwin@unlv.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/english_fac_articles

Part of the Ancient, Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque Art and Architecture Commons, Esthetics Commons, Other Arts and Humanities Commons, and the Theory and Criticism Commons

Citation Information
http://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/english_fac_articles/7

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English at Digital Scholarship@UNLV. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Scholarship@UNLV. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@unlv.edu.
William Hogarth and the Aesthetics of Nationalism

TIMOTHY ERWIN

How I want thee! Humourous Hogarth!
Thou, I hear a pleasant rogue art!

Draw the beasts, as I describe them;
Form their features, while I gibe them;
Draw them like; for I assure ye
You will need no caricatura;
Draw them so, that we may trace
All the soul in every face.

—Jonathan Swift, Description of the Congenial Club

All commentary on Hogarth begins in want and ends in surfeit. His images filled the blank slate of modern consciousness to overflowing with their antic inventiveness, moral urgency, and keen humor. In substituting the precise delineation of individual character for the coded outline of Continental history painting, Hogarth aimed at nothing less than a national revolution in taste. At home the opposition was the taste of connoisseurs and collectors such the third earl of Shaftesbury, as Ronald Paulson and others have demonstrated. The opposition abroad was the academic tradition upon which

I am grateful to the National Endowment for the Humanities for the opportunity to participate in the summer institute “From Hogarth to Handel: The Culture of Early Georgian England, 1714–1760,” hosted by Yale University and sponsored by the Aston Magna Academy, directed by Raymond Erickson. I would like to thank the Yale Center for British Art and its director Patrick McCaughhey, and also the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, for a summer study grant. Ronald Paulson kindly read an early draft and offered generous advice. Thanks are also due to the editor of this journal and the anonymous readers for their astute and helpful comments, and to Janet Aikins and Marshall Brown and my colleagues Ralph Buechler and Dave Hickey for stimulating conversation about Hogarth.

these preferences were largely based, and primarily the school of the Carracci. Not without humor, Hogarth characterized the vaunted disegno, or linear outline, advocated by the Carracci academy as the insincere expression of a dated aesthetic. He felt that the academic theory of painting had become overcharged with outworn beliefs, that it was no longer responsive to the demands of modern life. By reconfiguring the idealizing outline of history painting as a mark of realist beauty and expressiveness, he could revisit the shapes of traditional iconography and recast them anew through his own theory of the serpentine line of beauty. Some time ago Frederick Antal showed that Hogarth was a highly sophisticated student of other national styles, from Dutch genre painting to French rococo. Where the school of the Carracci is concerned, Hogarth looks abroad with a pointedly nationalist gaze, it seems to me, and with a determined independence reflected in theory and practice alike.

One surprising result of our exploring Hogarth's reconfiguration of traditional iconography is that it places in a new light the analogy of painting to writing so frequently alluded to in Hogarth, and this despite its famous association with the comic genius of Henry Fielding. The academic tradition stemming from the Carracci academy was a locus classicus of the formal metaphor linking the arrangement and perspective of painting to the emplotment of narrative. To read Hogarth against the backdrop of the rejection of pictura-poésis doctrine is to appreciate his innovative formulation of new relations among the arts, and especially those between painting and music.


3. Frederick Antal, Hogarth and His Place in European Art (New York, 1962), published posthumously. Antal's view of the cosmopolitan Hogarth may be compared to the view of architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner in The Englishness of English Art (London, 1956). According to Pevsner, Hogarth reveals an English cultural style in his avoidance of the baroque, his moralizing aspects, his powers of observation, and his intended middle-class audience. Cultural historians today would probably view these features as mid-eighteenth-century aspects of a developing British nationalism, not of a timeless Englishness. In any case, the portrait of Hogarth that emerges from a comparison of the two studies reveals an intensely English painter who was at the same time keenly aware of his Continental predecessors.

4. Modern commentators have generally noted a shift in aesthetics away from the image-text relation toward a music-text relation during the eighteenth century in Britain. Murray Krieger, following Joseph Addison and Edmund Burke, traces a hybridizing movement away from the centrality of the "reproductive picture" toward that of the "affective sequence of words" and finally to the "realm of sound" in his comprehensive overview of inter-art relations, Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign (Baltimore, 1992), 25–26.
We may begin with a few nationalist coordinates, starting with Hogarth's own career and extending through the early nineteenth century. David Bindman has drawn attention to the way Hogarth began to fashion himself as a "self-consciously English artist" during the 1740s. Although Hogarth was always a popular figure, the transformation would wait more than half a century to be fully appreciated. Only during the later decades of the century, after the Royal Academy lost its exclusive right to legislate aesthetics, Bindman writes, did the public begin to understand the particular native genius of Hogarth. By the end of the second decade of the nineteenth century, he adds, Hogarth had become a truly "national figure." In 1819 William Hazlitt could declare Hogarth not only a comic genius but also "one of the most extraordinary men this country has produced." Hogarth fills the void of the mind with "the natural history... of our own species," according to Hazlitt, and by doubling our experience extends our knowledge of humankind. Hazlitt's tribute aims to sort out a distinction also important to the painter, the relation of Hogarth to traditional history painting. In taking up Marriage A-la-Mode, for instance, Hazlitt pays close attention to its coloring, alert observation, and most of all its power of expression. The light yellow cast of the marble chimney-piece in the first scene, he says, highlights the pale dissipation of the husband. The amoral indifference of the young prostitute in the third scene, he says, reflects a refined depravity not her own. In a particularly brilliant passage he notes the contrast between the softness of her person—"the vacant stillness, the docility to vice, the premature suppression of youthful sensibility, the doll-like mechanism of the whole figure, which seems to have no other feeling but a sickly sense of pain"—and the hardened indifference of her character (p. 271). Distinct aspects of an empiricist aesthetic combine to reveal a

5. In Hogarth and His Times: Serious Comedy (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1997), 23, 45. Bindman points out that Hogarth's paintings were given a major exhibition in 1814 and that the Marriage A-la-Mode series was from 1824 on an important part of the founding collection of the National Gallery (p. 19). Bindman generally includes Hogarth's comedy in Joseph Addison's project of social politeness. The insistent good humor of the artist takes its classical tone from the rallying of Horace rather than the railing of Juvenal, he suggests, though the insistence of Juvenal on precise urban settings finds a counterpart in Hogarth's recognizable streets and taverns (pp. 33–40).

6. William Hazlitt, Lectures on the English Comic Writers (London, 1819), 266, 267; cited henceforward in the text. On Hazlitt's understanding of character in Hogarth, see further John Barrell, The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt: "The Body of the Public" (New Haven, Conn., and London, 1986), 322–26, a consideration of Hazlitt's article "Fine Arts" in the 1816 Encyclopaedia Britannica. The Lectures were delivered at the same hall where Coleridge lectured on Shakespeare, the Surrey Institution. The rise of Hogarth, like the rise of the novel to which it is so often compared, owes much to an expansive middle-class taste. In William Hazlitt: The Mind of a Critic (New York and Oxford, 1983), David Bromwich describes Hazlitt's audience as a mixture of the "self-taught" and the "self-improving" (p. 7). It is a measure of the place of Hogarth in the literary canon of regency England that he is the single artist discussed at length in these eight lectures treating comic writers from two centuries.
deep insight into human nature, here understood as the humiliating brutality of aristocratic coercion. And yet for all his radical sympathy Hazlitt ends the essay with a strong comparative qualification. The nationalism of Hogarth and his comic textuality, he suggests, are two sides of the same period coin. Together they limit the currency of the painting.

What is the main difference between the grand style of history painting and the familiar style of Hogarth? asks Hazlitt. The difference cannot rest between imitation and invention, because Hogarth is full of both; nor between the genteel and the vulgar, because Hogarth is a satirist of actual life, high as well as low; nor between the beautiful and the grotesque, because Hogarth has everywhere a strong sense of natural beauty; nor between the tragic and comic spheres of life, since Hogarth's rake knows all too well the distress of tragedy. It must rest instead between the abstract and intelligible on one hand and the tangible and visible on the other. "None of his characters," writes Hazlitt, "are thinking of any person or thing out of the picture" (p. 296). The difference between the familiar style and the grand style finally comes to rest in the representation of character. Hazlitt prefers the ideal manner of Raphael to the familiar manner of Hogarth, a preference first piqued by the Cartoons and then sated by long hours spent in the Louvre seated before Correggio, Domenichino, Poussin—"and more than these," he goes on to say, "of whom the world was scarce worthy, and for the loss of whom nothing could console me—not even the works of Hogarth!" (p. 301).

Hard words, these. While he broke sharply with Continental tradition, Hogarth always sought to preserve a connection to the high Renaissance. He only turned his back on the linear style that separated him from Raphael and Michelangelo, the disegno of the Carracci school, the better to approximate his Renaissance masters. Most of all, he prided himself on the truthful and sincere expression of character. Hazlitt would say rather that the truth is a partial one. Character in the idealizing style sustains an interest in those "permanent and universal objects" (p. 296) that another age called faith. Contrast the beggar awed by the miraculous presence in Raphael's cartoon The Healing of the Lame Man, he asks us, to the figures in Hogarth's The Pool of Bethesda. The faces of Hogarth reflect a physical need, those of Raphael a doubly abstract sense of want. "There are things cognisable only to sense, which interest only our more immediate instincts and passions," he explains, things like "the want of food, the loss of a limb, or a sum of money." But

there are others that appeal to different and nobler faculties; the wants of the mind, the hunger and thirst after truth and beauty; that is, to faculties commensurate with objects greater and of greater refinement, which to be grand must extend beyond ourselves to
others, and our interest in which must be refined in proportion as they do so. The interest in these subjects is in proportion to the power of conceiving them, and the power of conceiving them is in proportion to the interest and affection for them, to the innate bias of the mind to elevate itself. (P. 295)

Hazlitt writes after the fall of Napoleon, when the veil of late-eighteenth-century nationalist sentiment was lifted from British eyes. His distinction of spiritual and physical want is reflected by the secular return of a visual ideal eclipsed by Lockean skepticism and recovered through an emergent sense of benevolence. By the light of a dawning Romanticism Hogarth appears at once ambitious of change, extravagantly gifted by nature, and at the same time firmly bracketed by his own day. As if by compensation, the keen observation of Hogarth makes for a deeper immersion in the cultural moment, and from a new perspective at once ethical and comic. “Hogarth never looks at any object,” writes Hazlitt, “but to find out a moral or ludicrous effect” (p. 281).

While it found clearest expression during the 1740s, Hogarth’s nativist challenge to academic tradition can be dated as early as his “Britophil” essay of 1737, which encourages English beholders of paintings to enjoy the same brisk interpretive confidence that English readers of verse enjoy:

Let but the Comparison of Pictures with Nature be their only Guide, and let them judge as freely of Painting, as they do of Poetry; they would then take it for granted, that when a Piece gives Pleasure to none but these Connoisseurs, or their Adherents, if the Purchase be a Thousand Pounds, ‘tis nine hundred and ninety-nine too dear.7

In the auction ticket The Battle of the Pictures (1745) he would likewise present his own paintings as the beleaguered opponents of connoisseurship and of Italian masters and their copyists. The theory that had informed his art for decades found written expression in The Analysis of Beauty (1753), a treatise that replaces the disinterested principle of the je ne sais quoi with a frankly interested appeal

to what Hogarth calls, with an open allusion to Shakespeare's Cleopatra, "infinite variety." The Analysis of Beauty was erected on the twin supports of fitness and variety, one principle facing outward toward the Continent in order to rethink proportion and symmetry as utility, and the other facing inward toward Britain to enlarge the place of nature within the beautiful. The principle of fitness redefines the beautiful according to its usefulness in meeting a particular practical, rather than spiritual, purpose. It aims to set beauty free from the hold of an alien morality. The moral philosopher is little better than the copyist of foreign art on this score. In claiming a false connection between art and morality, the connoisseur mediates an understanding better left unmediated. For Hogarth the coded ethics of foreign masters are no more to be imitated than their individual manners. "What are all the manners, as they are call'd, of even the greatest masters, which are known to differ so much from one another, and all of them from nature," Hogarth asks, "but so many strong proofs of their inviolable attachment to falshood, converted into establish'd truth in their own eyes, by self-opinion?"8 A recognizable individual style or manner only proves the rule of novelty, he argues; the dry manner of Poussin would have disgusted Rubens, he says, as much as the extravagance of Rubens disgusted Poussin. Instead of slavishly imitating others, every young artist should begin afresh. Academic doctrine was more consistent than Hogarth would admit, of course, despite the famous quarrel between the rubénistes and the poussinistes of the académie royale. Sir Joshua Reynolds probably glances back at Hogarth in writing that while the personal manner of a Poussin or a Rubens may be considered defective, both artists gained their reputation through their beauties, not their defects. Even the most "striking and pleasing" individual manner will eventually lose its attractive novelty, adds Reynolds. Meanwhile, searching after an extreme individual manner prevents the aspiring artist from assimilating the tradition at large.9

8. Hogarth, Analysis of Beauty, ed. Paulson, 20. Michael Podro describes Hogarth's rejection of aristocratic moralism as an affirmation of the freedom of beauty to respond to morality or divinity "with its own voice, from its own position.... But how can painting do this? It cannot of course respond with its lines and figures to their theoretical maxims; what it can do is respond to the behaviour in which vice and virtue make themselves manifest; it can do this by rehearsing the postures, movements, affectations and extravagances of its subjects in its own procedure; not only miming but evaluating them by virtue of its innate sense of what is natural and what is exaggerated" (Depiction [New Haven, Conn., and London, 1958], 129). The comment reminds us just how much corrective invention is required of the satiric artist.

9. Sir Joshua Reynolds, Discourses on Art, ed. Robert R. Wark (New Haven, Conn., and London, 1975), Discourse 6, 102–3. If Hogarth occasionally conflates academic tradition and the Carracci school, Reynolds by contrast considers the "Academical-Bolognian school," as he calls it, like the Venetian, one more important school among many. In Discourse 15 Reynolds says that the Carracci formed "a most respectable school." He adds that if their particular excellence were to be "valued according to the number, rather than the weight and quality of its admirers, it would assume an even higher rank in Art" (pp. 273–74).
Where the theory of the Royal Academy gradually came to prize a moderate *inventio*, the academic tradition of the Continent had been mainly concerned with a classicizing *disegno*. The term signifies manual draughtsmanship, the middle stage in the creation of the artwork, but more importantly it signifies the intellectual and moral control of the line. The Carracci and their followers were always considered the models most worthy of imitation in this regard. Charles Du Fresnoy begins and ends his long Latin poem *De arte graphica* by praising Annibale Carracci as the artist who restored the high Renaissance art of painting to a lost glory through the mastery of linear design. In the following verses, quoted from the English translation by William Mason, annotated by Reynolds, Du Fresnoy describes the central doctrine of design by using metaphors drawn from the sinuous movement of the snake or the flickering action of a flame. “Chief from her,” that is, from ancient Greece, he says,

that flowing outline take,
Which floats, in wavy windings, like the snake,
Or lambent flame; which, ample, broad, and long,
Reliev'd not swell'd, at once both light and strong,
Glides thro' the graceful whole. Her art divine
Cuts not, in parts minute, the tame design,
But by a few bold strokes, distinct and free,
Calls forth the charms of perfect symmetry.¹⁰

The passage comprises a formal rhetoric of fascination; the perfected outlines of the Carracci embody codes of gesture and ideals of virtue to which the beholder is expected to conform. As if to finish the design the passage further invites the mysterious visitation of ideal beauty, *l'idea della bellezza*, a kind of neoplatonic blessing.

In his preface to the *Analysis of Beauty* Hogarth quotes the same passage, although from Dryden's prose translation, and complains of its obscurity before going on to reconfigure Michelangelo's notion of outline as the serpentine line

¹⁰ Charles Du Fresnoy, *The Art of Painting of Charles Alphonse Du Fresnoy*, trans. William Mason (York, 1783), 13–14. A touchstone of the formal analogy, the poem begins by quoting Horace “Ut pictura poesis erit; similisque Poesi / Sit Pictura,” or as Mason puts it: “True Poetry the Painter’s power displays; / True Painting emulates the Poet’s lays” (p. 1). C. A. Du Fresnoy (1611–1665) was born in Paris and went to Rome about 1634 to study painting. He paintings survive today in Florence, Vienna, and the Louvre, but his most lasting achievement is *De arte graphica*, the more than five-hundred Latin verses in which he treats artistic technique serially under the headings of invention, design, and coloring. He devoted twenty years to its composition, often seeking the advice of painters in the Carracci tradition. It is said that for the first five years Du Fresnoy also consulted with G. B. Bellori (1615–1696), librarian to Christina of Sweden and author of the *Lives of the Painters* (1672), whose “Idea” Dryden quotes at length in the *Parallel of Poetry and Painting* (1695). Together Du Fresnoy and Bellori codify the theory and commemorate the practice of the academic tradition opposed by Hogarth.
of grace and beauty. His own linear ideal is the cornucopia, the wire elegantly
twisted around a cone whose contours lead the eye along the continuity of its
variety, a form that pleases by surprising the eye with ever more novel sorts of
order. Far from binding the eye, the line of beauty will loose diverse Lockean
ideas in the mind of the beholder. Visual culture on the Continent included
habits of mind and ways of seeing that dated back to the Renaissance rediscover-
ey of single-point perspective, as Hogarth recognized. Believing that the medium
is no small part of the message, Hogarth was concerned to break these predis-
positions down and to remake them in theory as well as practice. Hogarth recasts
the static cultural politics of connoisseurship in a progressive theoretical frame-
work, and then modernizes the visual field by bringing everyday experience to
bear on aesthetics. Where Alexander Pope could speak slightlyingly of the ignoble
broomstick, for example, Hogarth would enlist all sorts of commonplace objects
in the service of explanation. He illustrates one of the theoretical prints for the
Analysis with images of dress stays, candlesticks, and bells. In the other print he
sets country dancers awhirl in such giddy motion that the Samaritan woman of
Annibale Carracci, watching from the margin, appears to want to join in the
dance (figure 1). Her wistful look recalls the heroic play of the antique gaze in
Annibale’s Farnese Gallery and also looks back to the Characters and Caricaturas
of 1743 (figure 2).

Engraved as a subscription ticket for Marriage A-la-Mode, Characters and
Caricaturas offers a sharp critique of the scuola Carracci. It is divided into three
sections. A group of heads in profile occupies the larger part of the print while
two much smaller groups appear beneath them. The three heads at lower left are
taken from the Hampton Court cartoons of Raphael. The one at far left is
St. John in The Charge to Peter. That to his right is the lame beggar in The Healing
of the Lame Man, and the figure just to their right is that of Paul in St. Paul
Preaching at Athens. The same three faces are repeated in the lower right in cari-
catures after Carracci and Leonardo da Vinci engraved by Pier Leone Ghezzi and
recently published by Arthur Pond.

The print thus claims that where the Carracci hold a distorting mirror to
human nature, Hogarth in Marriage A-la-Mode will represent human nature as
it truly is. And the legend across the bottom refers the viewer to the preface to
Fielding’s Joseph Andrews, where Hogarth is praised for the earnestness of his
modern moral series. Visual caricature, Fielding says, allows all sorts of license.
“What Caricatura is in Painting,” he goes on to explain, “Burlesque is in Writing;
and in the same manner the Comic Writer and Painter correlate to each other.”

Caricatures (1742), see further Lippincott, Selling Art, 22–24, 131–34.
Figure 1. Detail from William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty*, plate 2. Reproduced by permission of the Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery.
Where the comic painter depicts the monstrous, the comic novelist describes the ridiculous, and just as Hogarth avoids caricature, Fielding will exclude burlesque from his novel, except in those descriptions that he means as parody. The comparison between painter and novelist simply explains Fielding's approach to satire by way of illustrative allusion—a useful local analogy not intended to convey a theory of visual representation. Fielding then goes on to elaborate a well-known distinction between the sense of the ridiculous arising from affectation and the sense of the ridiculous arising from hypocrisy, a difference to which we shall return. Martin C. Battestin has identified the two small but detailed faces bisecting the print as portraits of Hogarth and Fielding sharing a private joke, quite
as if the engraver were inviting the novelist to step momentarily into his visual field. Fielding had invited Hogarth to draw him laughing in his preface, according to Battestin, and with the Characters and Caricaturas print Hogarth only obliges him.\textsuperscript{12} The butt of their shared joke is the effete taste of the connoisseur, and beyond that the effrontery of the artist who could impose upon it. Paulson points out that Hogarth has joined the face of his wife Jane to his own so that his portrait is literally “Jane-us”-faced, looking back to the critical conversation with Fielding and also, by way of contrast, forward to the unhappy couple of Marriage A-la-Mode.\textsuperscript{13}

All the high spirits suggest, furthermore, that while the mutual admiration of novelist and painter was genuine, their mutual discussion of caricature was not entirely serious. Caricature serves Hogarth as the false foreign counterpart of the transparent ethical representation of character—as Swift remarks, in the epigraph to this article—and also as something of a promotional pretext by allowing him to advertise that while Marriage A-la-Mode will be engraved by the best French draughtsmen, the faces and expression of character would be his own. The Carracci were much better known for the eclectic codification of artistic principle than they were for an association with caricature. G. B. Bellori (see n. 9, above) regards Annibale Carracci in much the same way Du Fresnoy had, as the artist who restored the grandeur of Roman art to heights unknown since the time of Raphael. Hogarth’s real argument is with the pretended idealism and persistent authority of the linear tradition. Caricature becomes a mark of insincerity because it is so wholly opposed to ideal beauty. A metonymy for the academy, caricature represents the inappropriateness to the British sensibility of visual representation as practiced abroad. Hogarth is impatient with any concept of the beautiful that renders beauty invisible to the ordinary viewer, as the linear discourse of disegno and the neoplatonic discourse of the idea tend to do. His own idea of beauty would be obstinately of this world. To say as much is once again to align Hogarth with the realist cultural iconoclasm of other art forms taking shape at midcentury—most notably the novel, if also as a more outspoken case in point—but not formally with emploiment.


The religious dimension of the print also requires some explanation because it bears on an important aspect of national difference. With Characters and Caricaturas Hogarth inserts himself into tradition between the high Renaissance art of Raphael and the counter-Reformation baroque of the Carracci as a Protestant artist who will correct both. The ten Cartoons of Raphael were originally intended as models for tapestries meant to line the walls of the Sistine Chapel. Taken as a whole they represent the authority of the Renaissance church as it derives from Peter and then Paul. Hogarth knew that it would be wholly out of character to pursue any such theme, as much as his career was influenced by the example of the Cartoons; unless he lived in a Roman Catholic country, Hogarth once said, he would rather have created The Four Stages of Cruelty than even the cartoons of Raphael.14 Seven of the Raphael cartoons eventually found their way to London. In the Charge to Peter shown here (figure 3), Christ stands before the apostles. He passes the keys to Peter with one hand and gestures toward the care of his flock with the other. The single face that Hogarth selects from the scene is that of St. John, probably because according to the Gospel of John there were only seven apostles present, not the eleven visible in the cartoon, and because John makes no mention of the keys. On this view the character of John represents religious skepticism. In The Healing of the Lame Man Peter performs a miracle with the powers entrusted to him by Christ. Again Hogarth selects a skeptical observer for his print, not the lame beggar being healed and accepted into the kingdom of heaven but the disconsolate figure yet to be attended to, posed just to the right of John. Just as the Church of England had preferred Paul’s interpretive freedom to the supposed timidity of Peter, Hogarth grants the Paul of Raphael’s St. Paul Preaching at Athens graphic primacy. In fact, Paul’s powerful oratory may be heard all the way across the horizontal border separating the characters of Raphael from the expressive faces above, the nearest of which actually inclines downward to listen to the apostle with an expression of benign approval. The varied expressiveness of the surrounding faces forms a standard of nationalist resistance as it would be represented in Marriage A-la-Mode.

The visual narratives of the modern moral series trace a monitory arc aimed at human happiness as understood by Locke, that is, as the highest ethical fulfillment of which individual human nature is capable. A series typically begins with a change of situation for the harlot, rake, or newlywed couple who are its willful

Figure 3. Nicolas Dorigny after Raphael Urbino, *Pinacoteca Hamptoniana* (1719), plate 3, *The Charge to Peter*. Reproduced by permission of the Yale Center for British Art.
and unhappy protagonists; it involves them in predicaments where they are fully at liberty to make unconsidered choices; and it concludes six or eight scenes later with their inevitable disappointment and death. In their intricate detail the images reflect an insistence on the acute moral observation that was so important to Locke and his interpreters and that should have allowed the protagonists to choose wisely. The visual tradition of the Continent is often implicated in their failure, either by distracting them from vigilance or by allegorizing their error. Unlike the exemplary istoria of Continental tradition, the modern moral series rarely contain clear examples of admirable conduct (Sarah Young of A Rake’s Progress and Francis Goodchild the industrious apprentice are the exceptions). Instead, the narratives become vehicles of instruction and delight by providing negative exempla and by virtue of their openness and innovation. Sometimes the very art of painting seems at fault, as if the painted image might slough off its impasto to become more like print. For the heroic themes of history painting, Hogarth substitutes his various anti-heroes. For the coded emblems of the past, Hogarth substitutes the staging of the theater, the raw invention of the novel, and the subjectivity of mental association. Entailed upon the inversion of iconographic tradition is the utter dissolution of traditional pictura-poesis doctrine.

The fourth scene from Marriage A-la-Mode (figure 4) reveals a stark contrast between traditional history painting and the novel moral tales of Hogarth, on this view. A mixed audience has gathered at the toilette of a recently married young countess who has just purchased an assortment of worthless objects at an auction. She has arranged to meet her lover, the attorney Silvertongue, seated at right, so that she can entertain him at home without causing scandal. Under pretense of explaining the obvious imagery on the screen, Silvertongue in turn arranges to meet the countess at a masquerade, an entertainment popularized by impresario John Jacob Heidegger and satirized by Hogarth in the early Masquerades and Operas.15 While an anonymous contemporary cast the gesture of the attorney in deictic verse—

See there, he cries, the Heav’n on Earth,  
The Scene that gives all Pleasure Birth:  
Blest H—g—r, that could invent,  
A Scheme both sexes to content!  
What longing Wife, what melting Maid,  
Who sighs not for the MASQUERADE?16

Figure 4. William Hogarth, from Marriage A-la-Mode. Reproduced by permission of the National Gallery of Art, London.
—no translation is really necessary. The satiric point of the unspoken conversation between the countess and her lover is that the imagery of the screen and the masquerade ticket are enough to communicate the message. Hogarth represents the deep rhetorical doctrine of the *pictura loquens*, the speaking picture so important to Horace and Du Fresnoy, as the invitation of an attorney to an adulterous assignation. The mysterious formal sisterhood of the arts he quickly decodes as a tawdry secret that anyone might guess.

Let us allow Jean-André Rouquet, a friend to whom Hogarth gave the task of explaining his work to a French audience, to fill out the scene. The audience has been invited to listen to “un de ses malheureuses victimes de la fureur des Italiens pour la musique,”17 Rouquet explains, the castrato Francesco Bernardi. Senesino, as he was known, would have been immediately recognized as an enormously popular and extremely expensive entertainer. During the 1720s and early 1730s he had received a considerable salary as a key member of Handel’s opera company, once earning an extraordinary fourteen hundred guineas during a single season.18 By the time *Marriage A-la-Mode* was engraved, Senesino had been away from London for nearly a decade, and he now represents a passing taste, the wave of enthusiasm for Italian opera that inundated London and brought the castrato to prominence until it receded before the rise of the oratorio. The baroque repertoire allowed for considerable improvisation and the singing of castrati especially was highly ornamented. Hogarth represents the song of Senesino as the furthest thing possible from a natural taste—that is, as an unearthly combination of male and female timbres articulated in an alien tongue. To indulge such extreme artifice, to enter so fully into the realm of the aesthetic, could only be the sheerest affectation, which returns us to the preface to *Joseph Andrews*. After claiming that the true source of the ridiculous is affectation, Fielding goes on to divide affectation into two kinds, one deriving from vanity and the other from hypocrisy. Rouquet points out that the humor of the assembly rests in its extraordinary variety, rightly enough. And yet there is also a distinct grouping of the figures at right and left, and Fielding’s distinction neatly marks off one group from the other. The woman dressed in white leans into the arpeggiated pause of

17. Jean-André Rouquet, *Lettres de Monsieur * * * à Un de ses Amis à Paris* (London, 1746), 36. “Il est extrêmement du bel air à Londres d’avoir quelque-fois chez soi un de ces animaux mélodieux qu’on fait venir d’Italie à grand frais,” he explains (p. 36).

Senesino as if waiting to be lifted on the pinions of song into the furthest sphere of aesthetic rapture. She affects to possess a taste she lacks out of sheer vanity, a comic and forgivable failing in Fielding. Because the musical duet offers little more than a fraudulent distraction from the whispered plan formed by the countess and the attorney, they pretend to discuss the sister arts out of something closer to hypocrisy. In effect Hogarth affirms Fielding’s local, ad hoc analogy at the expense of the academy’s formal sister-arts analogy.

Most of the satire of *Marriage A-la-Mode* is directed through opera at academic painting, as part of what Paulson has called the theme of art running through the series. The angular perspective of the second plate suggests opera staging, and the iconography of the fourth scene brings opera to bear on history painting. The silent interview of the countess and her attorney recalls a theme of prenuptial preparation painted in the late sixteenth century by Annibale Carracci and depicted time and again by his followers in the linear tradition of the seventeenth, the Venus adorned by the Graces (figure 5). Narrated by both Homer and Ovid, the theme self-reflexively embodies the artifice of ideal beauty (it had also served Pope as inspiration for the engraved frontispiece to *The Rape of the Lock* [1714]). In Hogarth’s satiric restaging the countess plays the role of the goddess, a loquacious French hairdresser undertakes triple duty as the three graces, and Silvertongue impersonates the usually absent Mars. Like the burlesque comedy of Fielding the parody is an inverted spoof, and like the charade conducted by Mr. B and Mrs. Jewkes in Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* it approximates a marriage. Where the mirrored image of Venus reflects an ideal beauty invisible to the mortal beholder, emblem of a mysterious and distant final causality, the mirror of the countess reflects the scheming head of Silvertongue, emblem of a merely moving cause. With comic displacement the face of the attorney beams from the wall opposite, painted in a style that has long been recognized as belonging to Jean-Baptiste Vanloo, another artist launching a foreign-inspired vogue, now for society portraiture.

Of course, Hogarth also kept his finger on the public pulse. He was never alone in wanting to see the spellbinding power of the aesthetic tempered by an enduring realism. During the 1730s opera itself felt constrained to withdraw from its more fanciful or magical aspects. Handel’s pastoral opera *Alcina* (1735), with its narrative borrowed from Ariosto and much influenced by Milton’s *Comus*,

Figure 5. Annibale Carracci, *Venus Adorned by the Graces*. Reproduced by permission of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (Samuel H. Kress Collection, 1961).
includes an early scene reminiscent of the toilette of Venus. The second scene shows the enchantress Alcina seated at her toilette in her island palace as a chorus of pages and damsels, knights and ladies, gathers around her.

\begin{quote}
Questo e il Cielo de’ contenti,
Questo e il centro del gober.
Qui e l’eliso de’ Viventi,
Qui, gli eroi, forma il piacer,\footnote{22}
\end{quote}

the chorus sings, words and sentiments that resonate with dramatic irony in the languid complacence of Silvertongue. The libretto relates a narrative of disenchantment from the decadent spell of the beautiful, a story about to be realized in the history of musical form as the birth of the English oratorio. In the narrative at hand the next scene takes us to yet another parodic center of pleasure making for disenchantment. But the sordid death of the countess’s husband makes the bagnio anything but the Elysium of the living where heroes take their pleasure. Literally entranced by a visual rhetoric, the countess is carried away to a murder observed by a portrait hanging as the obverse of the portrait of Silvertongue in the toilette scene. It represents the patron saint of painters, St. Luke, sketching the events below as if asking in amazement what the art of painting has come to. During his lifetime Hogarth was compared to Salvator Rosa, another highly independent engraver. A late etching by Rosa, \textit{Alexander in the Studio of Apelles} (figure 6), may inform the unspoken conversation of \textit{Marriage A-la-Mode}. Rosa shows the Greek hero discoursing confidently about a painting while the artist Apelles gently hushes him.\footnote{23} Behind the canvas the boys grinding the colors, like the African servant at the feet of Silvertongue, titter in amusement. The modernist point of the print anticipates Hogarth’s expressionist answer to the question his work poses about the representation of the heroic past in painting—that in the final analysis the true hero of the artwork is the artist.

\textit{~ ~}

Although nationalism is a prominent theme in the works of Hogarth, it is not an all-pervasive one. \textit{The Shrimp Girl} (ca. 1750) reflects urban maritime culture pure and simple, for example, without much regard to nationality. Less often Hogarth


Figure 6. Salvator Rosa, *Alexander in the Studio of Apelles*. Reproduced by permission of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Purchase, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, 1917).
addresses public policy in the role of advocate, as in *Gin Lane* and *Beer Street* (1750/51). Yet the nativist aspect of Hogarth is not limited to the choice of theme. Hogarth fashioned his nativist empirical aesthetic of freewheeling mental association in large part by self-consciously rejecting the Carracci-school aesthetic of fascination. There are at least three ways of thinking about aesthetic innovation in Hogarth. The naive view that Hogarth negates aesthetics *tout court* for the sake of some fixed and suspect realism, although based in Hogarth's own visual rhetoric, clearly does injustice to his artfulness. A more sophisticated if also more localized view, that the birth of aesthetics during the eighteenth century depended upon the polite sublimation of religious belief, tends to close off any discussion of comparative aesthetics in Hogarth (not to mention comparative religion). Hogarth's negation of foreign representational practice and his unprecedented innovation combine to form a thick aesthetic density;24 so very interdependent are the two, negation and innovation, in Hogarth that it is difficult to sort out where one feature leaves off and the other begins.

We may now turn to perhaps his most patriotic work, *The Gate of Calais, or the Roast Beef of Old England* (figure 7), by way of showing how the theme of personal heroism in service to the nation is mediated by music. With comic exaggeration verging on caricature,25 the print signals a turn away from the freighted iconography of history painting and toward the modern oratorio. As an art-form music is inherently less denotative than painting or poetry, and it may well have proved attractive to Hogarth on that account alone. Or the mixed and novel art form of the oratorio may have appealed to him as a fresh canvas would, or better, as the vehicle of a composite form to be rehearsed and performed in the mind of the auditor like a melody. At any rate, Hogarth stresses the textual aspect of the musical analogy in *The Gate of Calais* by inventing or recalling several

---

24. See Nelson Goodman's value-neutral anatomy of aesthetic density in *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis, 1976), differentiating the aesthetic from the nonaesthetic by listing four asymmetrical indicators extending across the arts. An object is aesthetic if it normally contains some combination of the following: syntactic density (most common in the visual arts); semantic density (typical of representation, description, and expression); syntactic repleteness (a function of embodying rather than schematizing syntactic density); and exemplification (symbolic integrity as opposed to symbolic denotation); pp. 252–55. Hogarth reflects a generalized composite density that may be particularized in these terms. In referring the visual dimension of his graphic art to sequential episodes more typical of verbal narrative, for example, he brings the semantic density of a well-ordered plot to bear on the syntactic density of the line of beauty. The transparent novelty of his self-conscious turn away from pictorial tradition toward music constitutes a form of exemplification, and so on. More important, aesthetic density opens onto a syncretic transitional moment in the sister arts when a residual rhetorical schema was combined with an emergent empiricism.

25. Horace Walpole considered the print a "national satire" verging on caricature; *see Anecdotes of Painting in England*, 3 vols. (London, 1862), 3:726.
complementary narratives. They include an autobiographical sketch, the traumatic memory of recent national history, and a biblical episode filtered through a recent oratorio by Handel.

The first is the brief narrative that describes how the painting came to be. During the summer of 1748 Hogarth visited Paris with friends and was returning to London when he was arrested at Calais for sketching the old English fortifications there. War with France over the Austrian Succession had ended only recently and Hogarth was suspected of being a British spy. To prove that he was a painter instead, writes Horace Walpole the following winter, Hogarth showed the arresting officers "several caricatures of the French; particularly a scene of the shore with an immense piece of beef landing for the Lion d'Argent, the English inn at Calais, and several hungry friars following it."26 Duly amused, the officers

released him. The painting worked up from these narrative hints includes a visual record of the story of his arrest, a small self-portrait capturing Hogarth in the act of sketching. He appears in profile to the left of the tower. Exactly which aspect of the scene he is drawing is left unclear. Nothing tells us that he is sketching the subject of the original caricature, though the pose would indicate that. Nor does the self-portrait belong to the final rendering of the painting since the material cause of its invention is represented by the hand of the otherwise invisible officer who has come to arrest him, itself just visible on Hogarth’s right shoulder. The officer’s halberd in particular suggests a familiar economy of means, as if abstract caricature itself had come to carry Hogarth away.

The self-portrait and the scene that surrounds it constitute what Michel Foucault calls “incompatible visibilities.” The painting neither replicates the story of its invention nor serves as copy of the image securing Hogarth’s release, but depends upon the story of arrest and detainment with the sketch at its center for meaning. Like Magritte’s famous pipe, The Gate of Calais forms a representational puzzle about time and space. Time is the conventional domain of the unfolding word, of course, while space is home to the static image. Here time and language are understood to rehabilitate space and imagery. The anterior narrative of suspected subversion makes an innocent sketch the guarantee of personal liberty, and the painting that results tames the visual field for a nationalist gaze by celebrating an unexpected connection between personal liberty and national liberty, between the freedom of the artist to paint how and what he likes and the liberty of his countrymen to see through alien conventions of representation.

The Gate of Calais appeared in the aftermath of the last serious Jacobite threat to Hanoverian Britain, with all its ideological consequences, and the most obvious story told by the image celebrates the victory of the English army over the Jacobite army. Like an army, the painting marches on its belly; victory is

27. Michel Foucault, The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences (New York, 1971), 4. Although he begins The Order of Things with a well-known analysis of Velazquez’s Las Meninas, Foucault tends to qualify the relation of word and image and to narrow the range of the visual field. His This Is Not a Pipe, trans. and ed. James Harkness (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1983), takes René Magritte’s well-known painting Ceci n’est pas une pipe (1929; actually titled The Betrayal of Images) as point of departure for a sustained meditation on sister-arts relations from the Renaissance to the present. Foucault views the painting as an example of the modernist dissolution of the interdisciplinary principle claiming that the “fact of resemblance” between a text and an image is also “the affirmation of a representative bond” (p. 34). The early view complements Foucault’s later distrust of the Enlightenment gaze, according to Martin Jay in Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1993), and eventually culminates in the famous discussion of the panoptic abuses of state control (pp. 38i–416). For an overview of Magritte’s series of pipe paintings that finds an interesting material connection to the modernist project of Le Corbusier, see Jeffrey T. Schnapp, “Art / Lit Combines; Or, When a Pipe is Only a Pipe,” Profession 1998 (New York, 1998), 37–50.
attributed to the superior nourishment of the British forces, yet another material cause. In terms of aesthetic shift, The Gate of Calais celebrates the release of beholders from a civic-humanist mode of vision and their introduction to new forms of inter-artistic analogy. The visual-verbal punning so prevalent in Hogarth is linguistic evidence of the shift, and the turn toward music invites beholders to fold strains of melody into the mix of word and image. The Gate of Calais mediates vernacular song no less than The Enraged Musician (1741). A period broadside called “The Roast Beef of Old England” scores the image as ballad opera where four of Hogarth’s figures burst into songs of lament: “Ah, hard-hearted Loui! / Why did I come to you; / The gallows, more kind, would have saved me from starving,” sings the Irish soldier poised over his soup bowl. “Ah! Charley, hadst thou not been seen, / This ne’er had happ’d to me; / I wad the de’il had pick’d mine e’en, / E’er I had gang’d wi’ thee,” intones the ragged Scots Jacobite veteran seated in the right foreground. From distinct national removes both soldiers display the dire results of misplaced loyalty during the ’45.

Englishmen of every religious stripe, and especially dissenters, liked to think of themselves as belated Israelites. In The Gate of Calais a contemporary commentator believed that he heard an allusion to the Old Testament text that Handel had taken for one of his oratorios. Hogarth places his image in the context of the victory of the English forces over the Jacobite army by harking back

28. Legend has it that the figure of the hungry French sentinel was later borrowed for army recruiting posters, where he was juxtaposed to a better nourished native counterpart; see John Timbs, Anecdote Lives of William Hogarth, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Thomas Gainsborough, Henry Fuseli, Sir Thomas Lawrence, and J. M. W. Turner (London, 1887), 56.

29. With its embedded narratives, The Gate of Calais forms what W. J. T. Mitchell terms an imagetext and what Peter Wagner has called an iconotext. See W. J. T. Mitchell, Picture Theory (Chicago, 1994), 9, 83, 89 n. 9; and Peter Wagner, Reading Iconotexts from Swift to the French Revolution (London, 1995), 12. Mitchell notes that the imagetext may just as easily indicate a representational gap as a representational synthesis (p. 83), and then goes on to sort out three possible attitudes toward the image-text relation, ekphrastic hope, ekphrastic fear, and ekphrastic indifference (pp. 152–60).

30. A musical afterpiece by George Colman called Ut Pictura Poesis! Or, The Enraged Musician (London, 1789) stages the empiricist victory of vernacular English music over refined Italian music in the name of a new sister-arts relation. Closely based on the print, the plot involves a knife-grinder promising a young suitor named Quaver to distract an Italian music teacher, Castruccio, with street noise so that he can elope with the teacher’s daughter Castruccina: “I’ll scour the street, and to his door bring down / The various terrors of this noisy town, / To split his ears, and all his senses drown” (p. 14).


not to Handel’s *Judas Maccabeus* (1747)—the oratorio that actually commemorated the victory of the duke of Cumberland over the Jacobites—but rather to the *Samson* of four years before, probably because, as Ruth Smith has pointed out, the earlier oratorio was revived during early 1744 when England seemed most at risk of imminent Jacobite attack. In Judges 16:3 Samson wrests the city gates of Gaza from their foundations to carry them away. In Milton’s words, he “by main force pull’d up, and on his shoulders bore / The gates of Azza, Post, and massy Bar / Up to the Hill by Hebron, seat of Giants old / ... / Like whom the Gentiles feign to bear up Heav’n.”

Hogarth likewise captures the gate of the enemy in representation and carries it away in victory while all around the enemy persist in their false worship. In Handel’s version Samson decides to make the strength of Jehovah manifest by pulling down the Philistine temple during his closing air:

Thus when the Sun from’s watry Bed,
   All curtain’d with a cloudy Red,
Pillows his Chin upon an orient Wave;
   The wand’ring Shadows ghastly pale
   All troop to their infernal jail,
Each fetter’d Ghost slips to his sev’ral Grave.

The song represents the deep, uneasy deliberation of the hero. A stately instrumental section introduces a vocal line that weaves an assertive yet plaintive melody through six verses rhyming *aabcbb*, and that returns to repeat the three lines rhyming *ccb*. The telling final line is set apart from the others by being repeated at the end of the stanza *a cappella*. It represents the decision of Samson to destroy the temple, and its repetition signals the narrative turn of the libretto. The line looks forward to the often-noticed claustrophobia of the print and especially to the chains suspended above the various figures, all of whom transform before our


eyes from living beings to spirits. We hear the line first as an uncertain lament for the bloodletting to come, so that the word grave arrives through the modulation to a minor key. When the last clause is repeated to represent a settled resolve, the word grave is heard through a transition back to the major. Meanwhile, the funereal heroicism of the reiterated melody implies emotions mixed of triumph and regret. On the return the line is again repeated, now accompanied by the measured pulsing of strings to signify the inevitability of the destruction to come. The anthropomorphic dimension of the inner gate, with its gaping mouth and wide-open eyes, has been linked convincingly to an image long associated with English morality plays, the harrowing of hell.36 If the aria from Samson carries enough allusive momentum to lend the print the sense of a curse to add to its other textual aspects, then the allusive iconography of the print lends that curse an unerring sense of direction and a permanent terminus.

What, finally, is nationalism? And what are we to think of its place in Hogarth? Most commentators would agree with a basic political definition of the term. Nationalism is the modernist idea that sets congruent borders between nationhood and government. Most commentators would then go on to distinguish sharply between the idea of nation and the idea of culture or folk custom, though the etymology of the word nation to mean common birth or kinship tends to blur the distinction.37 Nationalism mobilizes patriotism through the select representation of cultural symbols, just as Hogarth does in the Gate of Calais, though rarely through symbols so risibly reductive as beefsteak. Linda Colley argues that eighteenth-century British nationalism was created from cultural materials brought together on the representational loom of religion, trade, and economic progress. Protestant Great Britain was forged above all in response to the cultural challenge posed by Catholic France, she writes,38 and because the nature of the challenge shifted from decade to decade, the expression of British nationalism

38. Linda Colley, Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837 (New Haven, Conn., and London, 1992), 11–54. “Protestantism was the foundation that made the invention of Great Britain possible,” she argues (p. 54), so much so that the formative influence of religion would be difficult to overstate. The cultural threat from abroad was especially strong in the upper ranks of society, that is, among individuals who could afford to own paintings. Fully half the paintings selling for more than forty pounds in auction rooms during the first
shifted in turn. The anti-popery of the first half of the century intensified during the early 1740s with the War of Jenkins’s Ear, diminished after 1745 with the final defeat of Jacobite forces, and during the second half became ever more attenuated. The *Gate of Calais* depicts stereotypes regarding the slavishness, superstition, and idolatry of the French against the grain of a dawning tolerance to show that the sacrifice of liberty to popery continues to cost dearly. But the nation for whom these sacrifices will prove costly—and here, surely, is the punch-line of the print—is not England but France itself, prevented from sharing in the cultural superiority of the British.

National identity is moreover a composite social identity made up of various shifting allegiances. A single human being may wear several identities at once, Colley argues, sharing different aspects of his or her identity with different communities. 39 Hogarth speaks here from his professional identity as an English painter. Each cultural stereotype he endorses bears a symbolic or metaphorical relation to the art of painting. Like connoisseurs who misapply a popular interest in art to the purchase of old-master paintings, the gluttonous monk in the middle-ground figures as the misappropriation of trade by an interested clergy. The credulous women at left who find Christ’s face in a skate represent superstition, and by extension the notion that the artwork representing a miracle is itself somehow equally miraculous, the product of some dubious *je ne sais quoi*. Betrayed by their religion, the fickle French betray their allies in turn. Hence the overdetermined diagonals directing the gaze from the darkened foreground into the space of the arch and beyond. The single-point perspective of Renaissance painting, they suggest, creates a tunnel vision leading the unwary viewer down the path of perdition. Temporal as well as spatial, the visual progress leads to the Roman Catholic cross marking the end of the recessional vista, relic of an abandoned ritual and representational history. The gate above serves doubly as the raised altar of an idolatrous people and as a victory arch symbolic of Britain’s triumph over their lot. The Protestant cross atop the English tower becomes a symbol joining the personal history of the painter-as-patriot to the public deliverance of his nation, though with such hyperbole as to suggest that his heroic role not be taken perfectly seriously. Here as elsewhere Hogarth requires of the beholder a certain interpretive balance. The comic textuality of the painter targets an elite taste equated with the cultural otherness and immorality of the past. Standing

half of the century, Colley writes, came from the hands of Italian masters (pp. 165–66). The prominence of the Continent in the visual realm points the paradox of an iconoclastic artist such as Hogarth. It suggests the full weight of cultural resistance that Hogarth faced and provides added rationale for his aesthetic density. And finally it points to yet another reason for his extraordinary success with a popular audience.

39. Ibid., 6.
together with others before a modern moral series must have affirmed a sense of national community among English beholders. It must have strengthened the sense of a present moment morally sufficient to itself. Adopting such a stance then and now demands a careful equipoise. In taking the nationalist dimension of Hogarth very seriously, we diminish our sense of his good humor and affirm our distance from the moment. In not taking his nationalism seriously enough, on the other hand, we risk being unfair to the ethical foundations of a novel visual rhetoric.

University of Nevada, Las Vegas